

Traditional Pottery of INDIA

JANE PERRYMAN

Foreword by Susan Peterson

Pottery has been part of the fabric of India for thousands of years. Even today it is used for domestic ware and votive pieces as well as in architecture. The pottery of this vast country reflects the great diversity of peoples in India and each area is known for its different styles, decorations, and ways of making. In this book, Jane Perryman offers an insight into Indian potters' lives, their culture and traditional customs as well as their production techniques.

Traditional Pottery of India encompasses the diversity and beauty of India itself and most particularly the stunning pottery that is made there. India has more potters than anywhere else in the world and they produce the largest terracotta sculptures ever made (up to five meters). Despite this, little is known about their work – perhaps because the potter community is low caste and disregarded in India itself. For whatever reason, the skill and beauty of the work of Indian potters has been largely unheralded.

Jane Perryman has spent more than five years researching and collecting her material from a diverse spread of geographical areas: from the western desert of Kutch to the eastern Gangian plains of West Bengal; from the northern Himalaya to the tropical south of Tamil Nadu. The material is presented as living craft in the form of in-depth studies of traditional potters and their families. Jane Perryman is an internationally acclaimed potter who draws inspiration for her own handbuilt, burnished and smoke-fired work from traditional ethnic pottery. She long ago realised that whereas the pottery of areas such as Africa, South America and native North America enjoy a high degree of respect, the Indian potter's work is poorly recognised. In this book Jane Perryman tries to rectify this situation.

This book should not only appeal to potters but also to students of other cultures and indeed to anyone interested in India as a whole. This is a beautiful book on a fascinating subject.

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Jane Perryman

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Front cover illustration: domestic vessels from Kutch made by Mohammad Hussein of Lodai, Kutch, and decorated by his wife Hurabai.

Back cover illustration: woman from Chota Udepur, Gujarat decorating water pots prior to firing.

Frontispiece: Ayanaar elephant and horse (3.5 meters high) built and fired *in situ* at Dakshinachitra, the Craft Museum of Tamil Nadu near Madras.

Opposite: Chabindra Muduli of Balikondalo, Puri area of Orissa, assembling a *Kalasha* consisting of a pot covered with sacred leaves on which is placed a coconut and flowers. It is a traditional symbol of welcome placed outside the doors of houses, shrines or temples.

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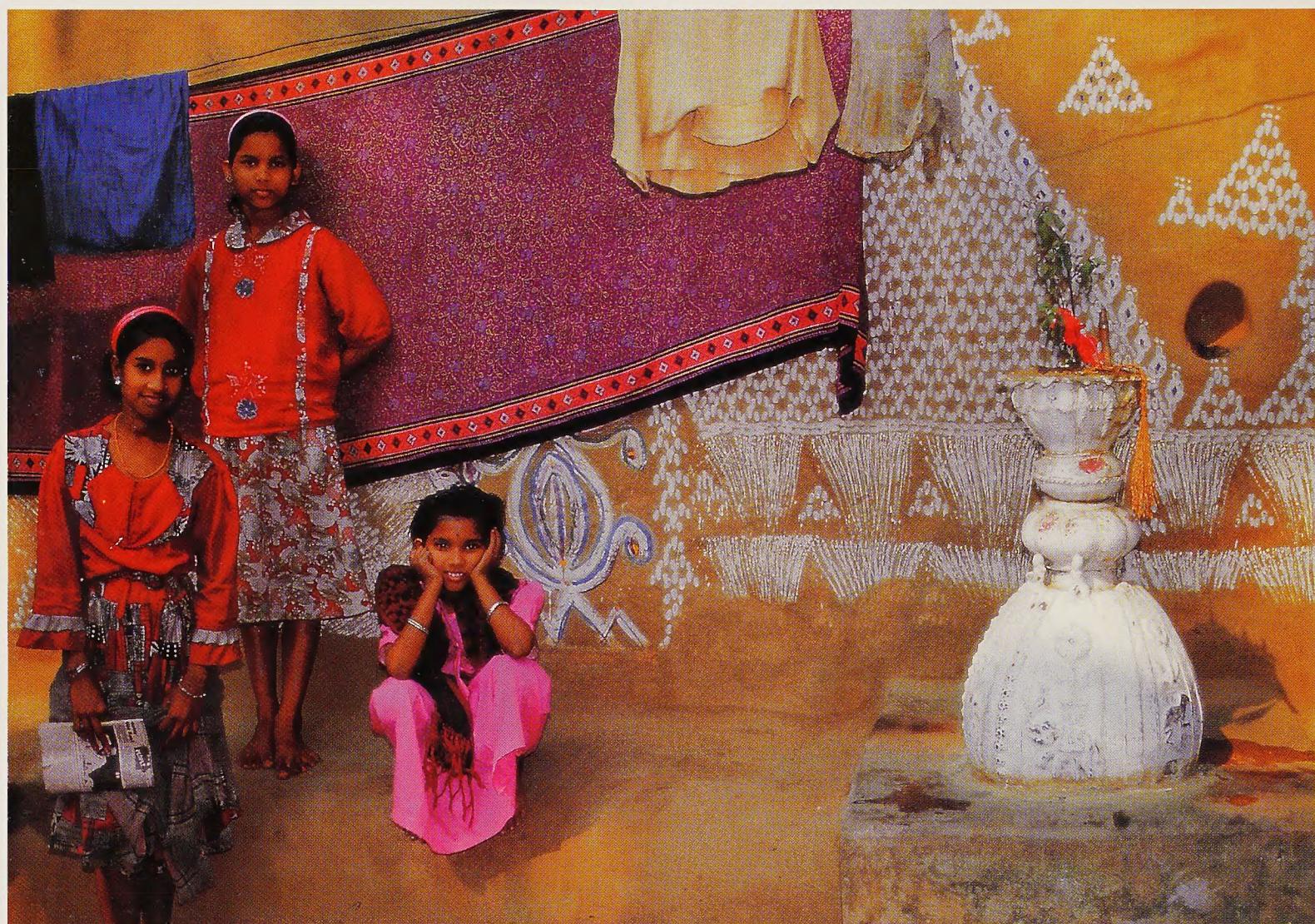
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To *Prajapatis* East and West



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To all potters who so generously gave their time, shared their knowledge and offered their hospitality.

Lastly, to India herself, one of the greatest loves of my life.

Terracotta shrine to the goddess *Tulasi* outside a potter's house, Balikondalo, Puri area of Orissa. It has been built by coiling, beating and modelling and the sweet basil plant which grows inside is worshipped every day by the family. The decoration on the wall is called *chitta* and has been recently applied for the festival of *Kurala Panchmi* at the beginning of December.



Foreword

India has one million potters, more than any other country on earth, and their clay techniques have been handed down for generations. Coiling and pinching a red common surface clay shape up into a cylindrical form, no matter how wide or tall, then paddling it out into a round form with a stone anvil and a wooden mallet – these are common traditional methods still performed today in India, Nepal, Africa, parts of Europe and America, and even China where stoneware and porcelain are also traditional. India just has more of the so-called terracotta, earthenware, handcrafted clay culture everywhere in her country than any other nation.

Jane Perryman, a woodfire, pitfire artist herself, has given a brilliant account here of many current pottery makers in India, against what I would guess to have been a lot of odds. From my own experience of India, I know the many difficulties, but also the rewards, that Perryman will have encountered in her journeys and in her research. She must be commended for having been willing to struggle with the task.

In this unique study, Perryman's exhaustive project is reported and photographed in amazing detail. She documents with daily notations a number of potter families in India, illuminating them with stories of the making, decorating, firing and ecology of the region. The potters' clay history is kept alive for these people by the rituals, ceremonies, and other circumstances in their everyday lives that demand pots.

That India has so many dedicated potters and clay sculptors coiling and paddling day after day the same or similar forms, with subtle variations, is in itself astonishing. Truly this is the art and life of the anonymous craftsman, of whom the two famous potters of East and West, Shoji Hamada and Bernard Leach, often spoke and wished in many ways to emulate. They thought that making pottery by hand in an industrialised society, for daily use, was the loftiest of professions. They revered the 'unknown' craftsman who does not sign his work, who accepts no credit or fame for continuing traditions and for supplying village needs, and who probably does not even know that his pieces are beautiful.

The preservation of these potter families and villages in the world is important, or if that is impossible, at least we

ought to have the knowledge that they still do, or did, exist. Gradually indigenous craft will disappear and may be entirely replaced by colourful plastic vessels and images. Documents such as the Indian ones in this book are invaluable contributions to the recorded history of mankind as it has been for thousands of years until now.

I can't resist comparing the potters of India with those Indian potters of the American Southwest who gather clay from mesas near the home-site, screen and prepare the material in like manner, and fire in the open. The two cultures differ in that the overt practice of worship in India promotes figurative images of gods and ritual beings such as the ancient handbuilt clay *Ayyanar* horses and animals in the remote shrines. The imaginative and colourful votive symbols of India are enchantingly depicted in Perryman's essays and photographs. She also pays attention to the various means of decorating mud houses with ricepaste paintings as if they were pots. Native American Indians primarily make pots, though some have ceremonial use.

Life and Art are one in India, whether we are thinking of handwoven saris and decorated cows or pots and icons. Jane Perryman has given us a vivid text and wonderful photographs of Indian terracotta that will long be remembered and for which true Indophiles such as myself will be grateful.

Susan Harnly Peterson
January 2000

Preface

India has a population of 930 million, the second highest in the world. The enormous variation in geography and climate, embracing tropical, desert, mountain, plain and coastal landscapes, produces a great diversity of ethnic and cultural groups. Despite the many large cities, 80% of this vast population live in rural village communities where cultural traditions have remained unchanged for generations, and exposure to urban markets and mass media is just beginning. A Westerner's perception of India is usually tainted by stereotyped images such as the Taj Mahal, or a leprosy victim asking for help through an aid agency. The real India is to be found in the village, where the material struggle for day to day existence is elevated by rich cultural traditions of art, craft, music and dance weaving together religion and daily life.

The seeds of this book began when I visited Pune for six weeks in December 1989 to study yoga, and saw a colony of potters producing a range of water pots, food containers and ovens beside a busy dual carriageway. I am a potter by profession and at that time had been using techniques of handbuilding, burnishing and smokefiring, influenced by African pots seen in museums and books. On that first trip to India it didn't occur to me that I would see the kind of unglazed low-fired pottery I love – the source of my inspiration. I realised that whereas the work of African and Pueblo Indian potters is highly acclaimed in the West, the Indian potter of the sub-continent is very poorly represented. A couple of years later, researching material for my book *Smoke-Fired Pottery* in the Haddon library in Cambridge, I found several doctoral theses with poor visual material on the subject of the Indian potter – but nothing else. (Stephen Huyler has subsequently published a book based on his doctoral thesis *Gifts of Earth* with excellent photography.)

I felt well qualified to write a book about Indian potters. I have natural empathy and understanding of clay as a material, of the frustrations and joys working with it brings, of the risks and excitement of working with the element of fire. I know the deep sense of satisfaction derived from creating a vessel from an amorphous lump of clay. I know the sense of integration with the earth, the source of our

material. I know the sense of belonging to past generations of potters, and appreciate the important archeological role of pottery in history. I am not an academic and this book is not written from that standpoint. I wanted to present the work of the traditional Indian potter as a living craft existing today, at the end of the second millennium. It would be impossible to record the huge diversity of work in a country where there are more potters working than anywhere else in the world. I decided to select different geographic areas and make in-depth studies of the potters to learn about their lives as well as their techniques, so selected groups could represent the whole.

Initial research was carried out at Delhi Crafts Museum where there is a changing programme of craft demonstrations and exhibitions of makers from all over India. I tried to select work of contrasting styles, functions and techniques as well as what I found personally pleasing. Although I have been visiting India yearly since 1989, the research for this book was collected over three trips of about ten weeks each. I had to plan my visits during our winter and spring months to enable me to meet my exhibition deadlines in England. On a practical level, large distances were covered by plane and train, then a hired taxi used locally. Interpreters were usually prearranged, a studio potter or an artist who would have some understanding of the techniques and materials used in pottery. Accommodation was in government rest houses, hotels, at the houses of friends, and sometimes with the potters themselves. Apart from a reaction to anti-malaria medication I have never been seriously sick in India, but am constantly vigilant about what I eat and drink.

None of this could have happened without the dedicated help of my friend, researcher, travelling companion and interpreter Indru Bhatia. Our meeting in 1993 in Cambridge was most auspicious and, as she would say, 'supposed to happen', although at the time neither of us realised its significance or what lay ahead in terms of travelling together. Support and generous spirited help has come from many other quarters and individuals in India through a network of friends and contacts. It has been an enormous privilege to spend time in the villages with potters and to experience

their hospitality and good natured tolerance in the face of lengthy questioning (much of which aroused looks of incomprehension). I have felt humbled at their spirit and *joie de vivre* in the face of material hardship and adversity.

A struggle for life's basic necessities is a familiar part of a villager's day to day existence and should not be underestimated. In the West, modern science and technology have solved some of these issues, but the spiritual impoverishment and social alienation created through our consumer society are problems an Indian villager has not yet suffered.

There is a story that a Bhil (tribal) youth was sitting under a tree blissfully playing upon his flute. A man approached him and said 'Why are you wasting your time, why don't you work?' Whereupon the youth enquired; 'What will happen if I work?' 'You will earn money,' said the man. 'What will happen if I have money?' asked the youth. 'You will have happiness and bliss,' said the man. The blissful youth, instead of replying, went on playing his flute.



Terracotta roof tiles – thrown and cut, Nizamabad, Uttar Pradesh. Supplying roof tiles to the local community was once part of a potter's production but increasingly, these are being replaced by factory made tiles.

Overleaf: Sundarambal from the village of Duvaradimanai, Pudukkotai district, Tamil Nadu makes several daily trips to the village well to collect water for her family.



Introduction

*The pot,
when on a woman's head,
seems as if it would kiss the skies.
It makes her tall frame taller*

*In the hazy light of dawn,
the sight of a peasant woman walking by
makes us wonder
at the intensity of the verticality.*

*Just as the child plays
on the mother's waist
the pot too fits in the curve of her side
The child and the pot
both so tender*

*Countless artists, down the ages
have craved to depict this.*

*Two on the head,
One at the waist,
that is a common sight!*

*Sometimes, clear water,
just drawn from the well,
spills over and wets the woman.
A glimpse of women,
gathered at the well
with their pots,
gossiping
gossiping
gossiping
is a sight not to be missed!*

*Pots scattered here and there –
some dipped in the well
others dangling inside it.
Another fully immersed
in the water.
A few on the platform of the well
Some lie.
waiting – silently. Others rise
creating an assemblage
Varied and profound.*

*Oh! The pot is everywhere!
Where there is buttermilk, in the cupboard,
a pot
Where water is stored, at the waterstand,
a pot
Where food is kept, on the stove,
a pot
Where there is jaggery, in the attic
a pot*

*In the heart of the home,
as 'gotraj', ancestors, a pot
Vastu, During house warming,
at the threshold of each home, a pot
where a marriage 'pandal' is built, a pot
when the 'garba' dance takes place,
in the courtyard, a pot*

*During sickness,
left in the outskirts of a village, a pot
At every stop in the pilgrimage, a pot
In death, at the cremation ground, a pot
At 'yagna' representing the planets, are pots
In the village square, the singer plays a beat,
on the pot*

*Let it be a fad, but,
One enjoys water from an earthen pot
its coolness and its flavour
One relishes
sour fermented buttermilk from a pot,
vegetable roasted in a pot
rice cooked in a pot*

*Oh! The tribals of the Panch Mahals!
Who go to work in far off places,
They may leave everything behind
but not their earthen pot*

From *The Pot*, a poem by Haku Shah



A niche built into the wall of Devender Kumar's house, a member of the *Rajwar* tribe from Sarguja area, Madhya Pradesh. It is decorated with relief patterns modelled in mud and painted with earth pigments.

'Life is just a lump of clay'

'Life is just a lump of clay' was a statement made to Haku Shah, the Indian anthropologist, by a tribal man from Gujarat. The statement can be interpreted both literally, referring to the daily requirements of life, and metaphorically, as the Hindi word *Mati* translates into both 'clay' and 'man'. Throughout rural India raw and fired clay plays a vital part in the everyday lives of villagers. Houses are constructed from mud covered with terracotta roof tiles, their walls embellished with designs painted from natural clay pigments. The harvest of grain crops which have grown out of the earth is stored in large containers made of unfired clay. Stoves for cooking are made from unbaked clay and the toys children play with are modelled from clay. The whole range of cooking vessels used in the kitchen, and vessels for storing both dry and liquid ingredients such as water and milk, are all made from clay. Clay pots carry water from the well to the house and from the house to the fields. Domestic livestock and poultry are fed and watered from large clay mangers set into the ground. Every rite of passage in a person's life – birth, puberty, marriage, death – are all marked by a ceremony involving a ritual clay vessel. The earth contains the remains of ancestors and, at death, will continue to

receive a deceased's remains. Through the offering of terracotta figures and statues a villager is able to fulfil his spiritual needs and communicate with god.

In the villages most households use affordable unglazed earthenware rather than manufactured vessels of stainless steel, plastic or glazed china. This earthenware has the advantages of being both practical and biodegradable, due to its low-fired temperature. The porous waterpot serves to keep water cool through evaporation, an important function in a country whose summer heat is legendary, and where electric refrigeration is not a choice for the majority of the population. Many Indians prefer the taste of food stored and cooked in earthenware rather than stainless steel or aluminium.

Below: Freshly painted house with earth pigments of the Paraja Tribe in the village of Fundaguda, Koraput area of Orissa.





Above: Large blackfired pots built by coiling and beating, used for boiling rice on the mud stove in the foreground, in Balikondalo, Puri area of Orissa.

Below: Dibakar Muduli preparing pots for a firing by protecting their rims with straw, Balikondalo, Puri area of Orissa. He works with his brother and together they fire 500-600 pots once a month. The pile will be covered with straw and ash and stoked with wood and dung cakes. A long pre-heating period will last all night, and the following day will be spent slowly increasing the stoking until temperature is reached. At this point pine needles are fed in and all openings sealed to turn the pots black.

A potter's place in society

The caste system divides social groups into 'pure' and 'impure', and the fear of a member from a 'pure' caste being contaminated and degraded by a member of an 'impure' group has led to the constant recycling of eating and drinking vessels. The symbiotic relationship between the potter making low-fired unglazed pottery and the rules of ritual pollution result in continuous cycles of earthenware being discarded and replaced. This regular replacement of all household pottery at festivals and such momentous occasions as birth, marriage and death keeps the potter in business.

It is believed that earthenware can easily become polluted due to its porosity and ability to absorb not only germs and dirt but also negative energy such as evil spirits, which cannot be washed away. Contamination through bodily fluids such as saliva is much feared. Clay cups and bowls used for tea, milk and yoghurt products, either sold to the public by street vendors or used in group functions such as weddings, are discarded and broken after single use. Women who are pregnant or menstruating are considered ritually unclean and isolate themselves by cooking separately from the family with a different set of earthenware. The gradual affordability of nonporous manufactured vessels which can be washed after use will gradually erode the role of the village potter.

The many contradictions in Indian culture are mirrored in the opposing names used to describe a potter. *Kumbhar* is a term of denigration reflecting the low-caste status of a potter and the unclean materials of mud, clay and ashes he



uses for his trade. In some areas of India the word has become so debased it is a term of abuse, applied to anyone who is considered unintelligent. The second word *Prajapati* meaning 'Lord of the People' refers to the very first potter god created to make the vessels required for containing food. The wheel, the stick for turning the wheel, the cone of clay from which pots are thrown, the thread which cuts the pot from the wheel, are all symbols of creation, and are believed to have been given to the potter by the gods as the tools of his trade. A *Prajapati* is someone who works with the basic elements of earth, water and fire which are considered sacred by Hindus. He creates vessels used in many religious ceremonies and as such is a revered and respected member of the village. In many communities he even acts as an intermediary priest communicating directly with god, and is sometimes known as *Bhagat* or pious man. The potter community is patriarchal so that name, position and possessions are inherited by its male members. There are strict divisions of labour between the sexes which may have slight geographical variations, but basically women are responsible for the areas of clay preparation and decoration and also assist with clay collection, making and firing. However, men are seen as the dominant producers and are responsible for making the initial form whether on the wheel or by hand and taking important decisions such as the arrangement of items and fuel during firing. Even where a woman's contribution of elaborate decoration is considerable, she is never given credit for the final product. Although in some areas women handbuild (coiling and beating) it is usually taboo for them to throw on the potter's wheel. Through the centuries they have provided essential goods and services to their local communities, secure with their place and function in society as members of the artisan caste. At the beginning of a new millennium the forces of industrialisation and consumerism are beginning to encroach upon their lives and cause great changes.

Income and Barter

Throughout Indian history a system of barter called *Jajmani* has prevailed as the main vehicle of exchange between maker and customer. *Jajmani* is an inherited reciprocal arrangement between two families or individuals in which the goods and services of one are exchanged for those of the other. Although becoming eroded through the influence of a monetary economy, the barter system is still an important part of a potter's income in rural areas. The *Jajman* is the major local landowner and is supplied with the potters' produce (vessels, tiles etc.), in return for loaning him a portion of land for the cultivation of crops. If the potter owns land then grain and foodstuffs are the currency of exchange and in times of scarcity, such as famine, the system

affords the potter some security. *Jajmani* reaches beyond an arrangement with landowners – the contract also exists with other members of the community such as the carpenter, blacksmith, weaver, haircutter and priest, all exchanging their service or product for clay items made by the potter. *Jajmani* is essentially a rural tradition; potters living in cities and towns exist within the monetary system and conduct their transactions with money.

During my discussions with potters I find a common complaint is about the increasing scarcity of raw materials and the fact that they are no longer free but require payment. Traditionally, under the *Jajmani* system, potters had the right to excavate clay on any land in the village, including private fallow land. However, with the weakening of the system and encroachment of common land, rivers and lakes, most potters have to make some payment for the collection of clay. The government's reforestation programs are sometimes located on land rich in clay deposits which were freely excavated for generations but are now forbidden. With the serious problem of deforestation over the last few decades, firewood, the most commonly used fuel for firing, has become scarce and expensive where once it was a free resource. The competition for other fuels, such as agricultural and industrial waste and cowdung cakes, has made them an expensive part of production.

Traditional rural markets for earthenware vessels are already diminishing due to the introduction of manufactured plastic, metal, china and glass. During the festival of *Diwali* (Hindu New Year) for example, potters once sold thousands of *diyas* (clay oil lamps), but now sales are dwindling because of competition from wax pots, candles and electric bulbs. This decline in demand is resulting in a substantial proportion of the sons of potters leaving their hereditary occupation and going into other trades such as factory work and labouring.

Potters and religion

Although India contains a wide diversity of religions and sects, the most dominant is Hinduism, practised by 80% of the population. For this reason most of the potters I have selected are Hindu except the Muslim potters from Kutch and the Tribal clay makers (non potter caste) from Madhya Pradesh. The four *Vedas* (sacred texts of divine knowledge) are the books containing the principles of Hindu philosophy. The Hindus believe that a follower has to go through a series of rebirths or reincarnations. These will eventually lead to *Moksha*, the spiritual salvation which frees us all from the cycle of rebirths. With each successive rebirth we can move closer to or further from eventual *Moksha*, depending on our state of *Karma* (literally the law of cause and effect). Bad actions in life result in bad *Karma* leading to a lower



Tulasi container (1m/40in. high), Balikondalo, Puri area of Orissa. In this area the goddess *Tulasi*, consort of *Vishnu*, is worshipped in the form of a sacred *Tulasi* plant (sweet basil). It is supported by a terracotta shrine built to resemble the form of local temples in Puri and Bhubaneshwar. Made by coiling and beating, these shrines are decorated with a mixture of mythological and religious figures, animals, flowers, suns, moons and stars. The *Tulasi* shrine is kept outside the house and worshipped every day.

reincarnation, whereas good deeds and actions will result in the accumulation of good *Karma* and reincarnation to a higher level. This will bring the practitioner closer to eventual freedom from rebirth. The vast pantheon of gods which constitute the Hindu religion can be seen as manifestations of one god who is represented by *Brahma* the Creator, *Vishnu* the Preserver and *Shiva* the Destroyer. The god can usually be recognised by an associated animal representing the 'vehicle' on which he/she rides as well as a consort and a symbol. *Brahma*'s consort *Saraswati*, for example, is the goddess of learning who rides upon a swan and holds a stringed musical instrument.

Hinduism has rules and regulations of the caste system. There are four main castes: *Brahmin* (the priest caste and highest of them all); *Kshatriyas* (soldiers and governors); *Vaisyas* (tradespeople and farmers); and *Sudras* (manual workers and artisans, including potters). These basic castes are further sub-divided into hundreds of lesser divisions, and beneath all the castes are the *Dalits* or Untouchables (formerly known as *Harijans*), to whom the most menial and degrading occupations are allocated. Hinduism is not a proselytising religion; a person is born a member but cannot convert into it. Similarly a Hindu cannot change the caste he was born with even if he converts into another religion such as Buddhism, Christianity or Islam. So a potter is born a *Kumbhar* and will remain a member of that caste throughout his life. Throughout my research I have often been asked my profession and my reply of '*Kumbhar*' has often resulted in surprise because Westerners are not equated with the low-status of potters.

India has a large Tribal population of over 50 million living outside the great mass of Hindu caste society, with their own separate culture and traditions. For the most part they are an agricultural or pastoral people having lived for thousands of years in the hills and densely wooded regions, their origins preceding the Vedic Aryans and the Dravidians of the south. They do not adhere to the rigid rules governing their Hindu neighbours; their artistic expression contains great freedom of imagination and conception which has directly influenced the style of votive terracotta they commission from Hindu potters.

There are over 500,000 villages within India, each one consisting of many caste, ethnic and religious groups living together. There is a definite hierarchy but the interdependence of the different factions ensures a relatively efficient and smoothly running society. Hindu villagers marry within their own caste but outside their village, which creates strong ties and great loyalty to their village of origin. Potters live together in their own communities downwind on the outskirts of a village, so that smoke and ashes from their firings blow away from other villagers. In rural areas, though very few own the most valued asset of land, most

potters own their own house, which is also their workshop, showroom and sales area. In the large metropolitan cities, however, where space is at a premium, they are usually forced into squalid cramped conditions.

The future for potters in India

Economically, potters exist on a subsistence level and any extra expenditure, such as a dowry or unforeseen illness, entails a loan with the accompanying inevitable debts. It has been recommended by various government commissions that potters should be included in the category of 'Socially and Educationally Backward Classes'. This would entitle them to affirmative action programmes such as reservation of seats in institutions of higher learning and jobs, special training programmes and interest-free loan schemes for equipment such as electric wheels and kilns. Many of the potters I visited in rural areas have seen little change for generations, the limitations of their tools resulting in remarkably high levels of manual dexterity. A consequence of these limitations is that the Indian potter is encouraged to produce work which embodies the most economic solution of form and function. In doing so he has created vessels and artefacts of great beauty and spirit.

Transition periods are difficult and it will take time for a new aesthetic to emerge from a new technology. Meanwhile let us document and celebrate the work of the traditional Indian potter before it is overtaken, swallowed up and lost forever. Jyoti Bhatt, Gujarati painter and photographer, describes the dilemma facing traditions of the village world hurtling towards the 'modern world':

Terracotta toys which belong to an unbroken tradition since the time of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa (c. 3,000BC), are being replaced by plastic cars and planes. Clay images made as votive offerings for tribal shrines are sold at fairs organised by government departments, and end up as decorative pieces in city homes, shorn of their basic ritual association. While clothes which are spun, woven, printed and embroidered by hand are to be found in fashionable boutiques in the city, ironically, in the villages of their origin, they have been replaced by T-shirts with printed images of Bruce Lee and Mohammed Ali, and inviting messages like 'I am available' splashed across their fronts. The word 'nylon' has become so synonymous with quality that a village potter will refer to his best clay pot as a 'nylon' pot, and the grocer will extol the 'nylon' quality of his puffed rice!

Change is inevitably brought about by economic and social pressures in a time of political and industrial development. But it is a pity that the old should be stigmatised for the wrong reasons as being primitive, and that social status should depend on the destruction of what was beautiful and precious.



Water pots with dramatic fire marks, Kakriguma, Koraput area of Orissa. The recently thrown pots in the background will be beaten to the size of the pots in the foreground.

Vessel Making

The production of clay vessels in India is an ancient craft, datable back to 6,000BC through remains found at Mehrgarh, on the western bank of the Indus river. Around 3,000BC, wandering tribes settled on this fertile river land which became the Harappa civilisation and left behind indications of a highly developed culture including pottery making. Many of the forms, techniques and decorative designs from this period are still being used today, expressions of the unbroken tradition of low-fired earthenware over thousands of years. During the Vedic period (1,500BC – 600BC) pottery known as Painted Grey Ware was produced, whose characteristic was its grey colour obtained through reduction firing. This was followed by the Northern Black Polished Ware of around 400BC, a highly lustrous pottery developed during the Mauryan period.

Pottery of the Gupta period (AD300 – AD600) was characterised by decorative bricks, tiles and vessels embellished with painting, stamping, incising and moulding. Sometime during the invasion of Islam in the 11th century, glaze was introduced (and later by the British) but until recently has never really penetrated beyond the major urban centres. Glazing requires high-temperature kilns which are not affordable to potters, and whereas white kaolin is uncommon in India, there is an abundance of excellent low-firing clays in almost every village.

Throughout India, village, nomad and city dwellers use terracotta pots to carry water long distances from the well and to keep drinking water cool and clean within the house. The classic waterpot form is round-bottomed, designed to be balanced on a fibre ring on a woman's head (sometimes

several stacked one on top of another) and carried long distances. A wide range of vessels for everyday household use are made with regional variations on design, decoration and ethnic preferences for black or red firing. A villager might wait for a whole year and walk miles to a market in order to buy a cooking pot made in a certain village or a water pitcher made in another. There are separate shapes for carrying on the head, at the waist or by hand, and special sizes of pot to contain certain measures of rice, oil, milk and yoghurt. Cooking pots also vary in size and shape from open dishes for cooking *chapattis* to large round-bottomed bowls for boiling *paddy* (rice before the husk is removed). Storage pots for water, grains and dried foodstuffs vary from region to region, their shapes squat or tall, their necks broad or narrow according to their use.

The potters and their work presented in this section are based on a variety of geographic locations. The fine pots with distinctive character from Himachal Pradesh in the Himalaya are different in form and decoration to the pots of the Kutch desert where the potters are Muslim and produce work reflecting their culture and traditions. In Maharashtra women potters handbuild using coiling and beating techniques whereas the potters of Delhi produce work from an urban environment. The decorative vessels from Uttar Pradesh, which are blackfired with silver inlay, are examples of designs produced primarily for the urban market. The cupboards and grain containers built from unfired clay in the *bhungas* (round mud houses) of Kutch use the same making and decorating techniques as pottery, and represent the unfired vessels of India.



Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh is a mountain state bordered by Kashmir to the north, Tibet to the east and the Punjab to the south, forming the transition from the great plains to the high Himalaya which divides India from China.

I was able to make contact with traditional potters in this area through Mansimran (known as Mini) and Mary Singh, whom I had met at a British Council symposium of Indian studio potters in Delhi. Indian culture is saturated with almost overwhelming hospitality, and once an initial contact is made, you are sent along an eternal path of connections in your chosen field. Whatever you want to see or experience seems to happen miraculously.

Mini Singh, a large framed striking Sikh with long grey flowing hair and beard, is the son of Gurcharan Singh who had studied ceramics in Japan during the early 1920s. It was in Japan that he met Shoji Hamada, Soetsu Yanagi and Bernard Leach. As a young man, Mini was sent to St Ives to study at the Leach pottery and later with Geoffrey Whiting, where he learnt studio pottery techniques. Mary is English (and, coincidentally, grew up in Cambridge where I have spent most of my life). Together they started a crusade to keep traditional pottery alive, besides running a studio pottery and selling their own glazed domestic ware. Aided by grants from the Indian Handicraft Board they set up a rural marketing centre beside their home at Andretta. The Andretta Pottery and Crafts Society was born, which buys work from traditional potters and sells it in major cities throughout India, often arranging for the makers to demonstrate their skills to the public too. The Singhs have recently started to export this work abroad and I was startled to see it in a shop window in Cambridge, next to the wholefood shop where I buy bread every week. It was curious to think I had spent two weeks with the maker in his Himalayan village earlier that year and could possibly have watched it being made. It emphasises the invisible web which links potters all over the world.



Potters here enjoy a relatively higher standard of living than *Kumbhars* in the rest of India, partly because there is still a demand for earthenware vessels (aluminium and plastic ware have not yet flooded the markets), and because of the strong tradition of using clay figures and vessels for ritual occasions. The area is still rich in folklore and legends involving the potter, his wheel and his pots, illustrated by this myth of the lovers Sohni and Mahwal, related to me by Mini Singh:

While Mahwal, a prince from the Middle East, was walking through one of the bazaars he saw a beautiful woman called Sohni selling pottery and fell in love. Both the families disapproved of the relationship so they used to meet secretly on a little island in the middle of the river. She would float

Opposite: Rhiju turning the spoked wheel with a stick which engages in a hole in the rim – the momentum will be enough to throw one large or two small pots before he has to turn it again.



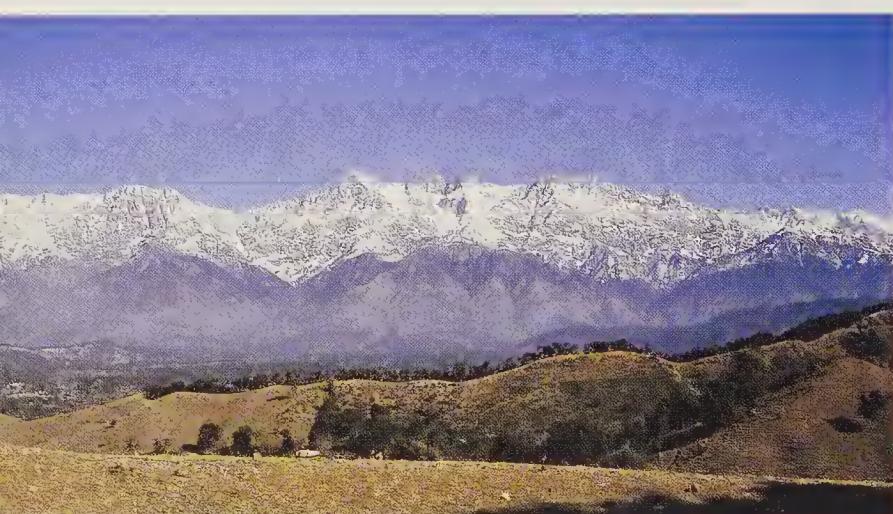
Courtyard in front of Rhiju's house. Clay is drying on the *charpoy* (rope bed) for the terra sigillata slip, and decorated pots are drying in the sun. On the left, set in the wall, is the family shrine to Lord *Shiva*.

across on a water pitcher to her lover who was waiting on the banks with a fire ready to warm her. Sohni's aunt discovered their secret and exchanged the pot with a slightly underfired one so that as she crossed the water it started to disintegrate. She shouted for help whereupon Mahwal jumped in to save her but the turbulent waters drowned them both.

Gadhiara is a small village of 18 houses situated 200m (650ft) above a small river in the Upperli Kothi district of the fertile Kangra Valley about 23km (15 miles) south east of Kangra. A stony path winds its way down into the village for a mile

through a pine forest of *cheel* trees from the dirt track above; in the distance a backdrop rises of white capped mountains from the Dhauladhar range of the Himalayas. This is one of the most attractive villages I have visited in India. The beauty of mud architecture is visible everywhere, with vertical and horizontal planes merging together organically. Mud stairs and cupboards grow out of floors and walls inside, and outside continue to flow into courtyards. Reflecting the contours and colours of the surrounding landscape, complete visual harmony is achieved. Hand-cut grey slate tiles cover the roofs, also acting as drying surfaces for the buffalo dung cakes which can be seen in neat lines and rows everywhere, implanted with the fingermarks of the woman who patted them into shape. The buffalo is integral to the culture of the village, providing not only milk but also dung for cooking and firing fuel, as well as fertiliser for crops. Because the village is largely self-sufficient and has not yet been invaded by non-biodegradable products such as plastic, it is clean and free from the usual debris of urban areas.

Houses are two-storied mud brick buildings with overhanging slate roofs and balconies which overlook communal courtyards inhabited by buffalo, cows, goats and sheep. Walls and floors are kept clean by the regular application of liquid cowdung and little steps and pathways made of river stones link the different levels of houses. A divided patchwork of land, cultivated with vegetables and crops, lies immediately around the village, the more fertile land by the river being owned by a landowner. At this time of year, in spring, the



View of Dhauladhar range of Himalaya from the Upperli Kothi district of the Kangra valley.

patches of emerald green wheat lie in startling contrast to the acid yellow of the mustard fields. The surrounding hillsides are criss-crossed with hundreds of sheep tracks forming linear patterns where the animals are grazed. A wide variety of indigenous trees grow amongst the fields including mango, papaya, and lemon for fruit; *dhaman* and *kraal* for animal fodder, rope making and firewood; and bamboo for house building.

Righu Ram, who is 66, lives in the centre of the village with his wife Bimla Devi, son Surender, daughter-in-law Lalita and granddaughter Shubnam, in the house of his father and grandfather. The village is really a large extended family and half of its inhabitants are relatives; his brother lives across the courtyard and his uncle next door. Righu and Bimla have three sons; the eldest and youngest have typically gone into different trades and work away, partly because the demand for clay vessels is decreasing, and partly to increase

their standard of living. The middle son regrets his decision to stay and work with his father, as the stigma of his low-status profession means he cannot find a wife. This situation is compounded by the fact that he has been deaf for two years without any hope of successful treatment. Physical disability is a further disincentive in the marriage market. The main occupations of villagers in this area of Upperli Kothi are factory work, teaching, driving, clerical work for the Public Works Department, and also army work. A young girl looking for a husband here would consider a potter as a last resort, in the belief that her life ahead would unfold into drudgery compounded by low social and economic status.

The domestic vessels of Rhiju Ram and Bimla Devi (they work in a team) are of the finest quality and the most exquisitely decorated of any I have seen throughout India. Unless Surender finds a wife, the ancient art of this family will be lost forever. The dilemma here is being repeated all



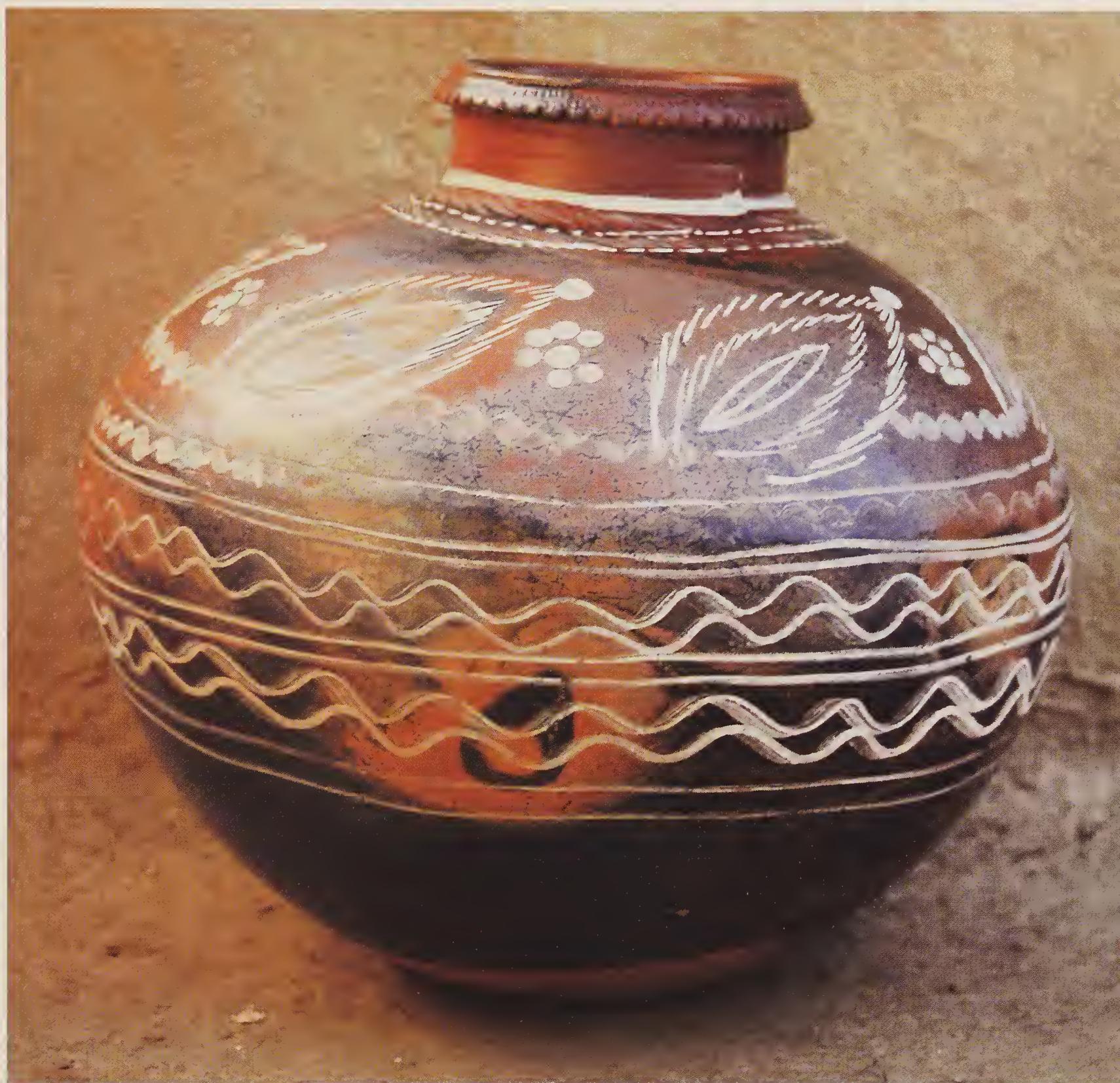
Left to right: Rhiju Ram and Bimla Devi of Gadhara, Kangra Valley, Himachal Pradesh.



Right: Large pot 50cm (20in.) high for containing water.

Below: Small containers 13cm (5.11in.) high for containing milk.





Above: Water pot 24cm (9.5in.) high showing the 'eye' firing mark caused by direct contact with the buffalo dung.

Left: Detail of water pot showing Bimla's painted slip decoration on terra sigillata slip.

over India as the sons of master potters are moving into other occupations and abandoning the traditional work of their ancestors.

The first time I visited the village was in December, coming straight from the potters' colony in Delhi, and there couldn't be more of a contrast between urban squalor and pollution and the tranquil crisp air of Gadhia where breathing suddenly became a delightful sensation again. Work is seasonal and stops in the winter months of mid-November to January and during summer from mid-May to July, so I arranged to return the following year in March when production would be underway again.

Day 1

As we enter the village the familiar sound of beating can be heard and we see Righu and his older brother Phinru Ram working side by side on the verandah; this scene of the two brothers has remained unchanged for decades. The building is on a level higher than Righu's house and consists of two small divided areas where clay, tools and piles of sherd sitters are stored, with a smaller room leading off the side for damp pot storage. This is fronted by a 2.4m (8ft) deep verandah where the clay preparation and making takes place. Curiously, there are several more storage areas for finished work in other buildings dotted all over the village, a result of the continual division of inherited land and property. Righu is one of six brothers, so when his father died the family home was divided into six, and this would have happened many times before with past generations.

We are shown examples of their stock which covers the full range of domestic vessels in a variety of shapes and sizes:

Gharrā for containing water

Muggi for carrying water to the fields

Gharau for boiling milk – different sizes

Dhunnu for boiling milk

Tudhunu for boiling milk and buttermilk

Muggru to carry milk for sale

Kawradu and *Dhialu* for yoghurt (different quantities)

Girriya for ghee (clarified butter)

Parru small container for general use

Katori for vegetables

Girya for pickles and ghee

Kanatu for water drained from rice then given

to the animals

Handu for cooking

Kangri charcoal burning heater used in the winter

Hooka and *Chillum* for tobacco smoking

Goluk money box

Auli ritual pot for marriage

plus other ritual pots for death and birth.

Below: The range of domestic vessels made by Rhiju: Pots for carrying water and milk, pots for boiling milk and making buttermilk, pots for making yoghurt, pots for making pickles and ghee, pots for cooking vegetables, money boxes, *chillums* for smoking tobacco plus various ritual pots for marriage, birth and death ceremonies.

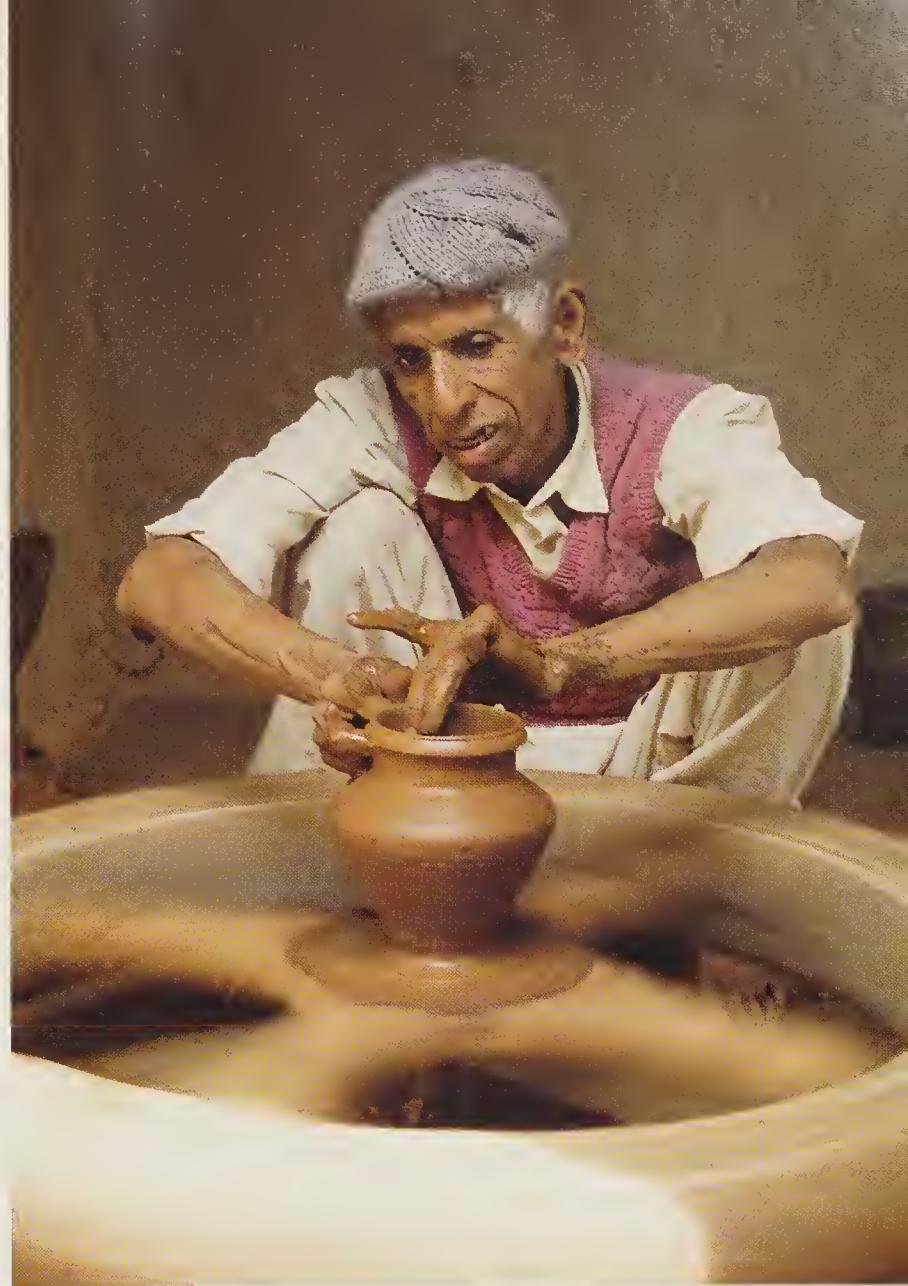


The Kangra valley is richly endowed with natural clay deposits and the brothers use two sources, one for red clay and one for yellow; both are within three miles of the village. The clay is collected twice a year; the family excavates it and transports it home by hired donkey where it is stored dry in piles inside the workshop.

Today Righu and his son Surender are throwing three sizes of waterpots. The making season began 18 days ago, after the winter break; before that they say their hands would freeze in the water. Their working day begins at 8am and will continue until 2.30pm. Afternoons are spent in the forest collecting fodder for their animals and firewood for cooking. When Righu was younger he used to work a longer day but now he is limited by arthritis in his hand joints and a problem with his upper arm and back. He has been a potter for 50 years and proudly tells us he could once throw 100 pots a day. He is using a spoked wheel made by his grandfather from wood and compressed clay mixed with coconut fibre and supported with bamboo. It rests upon a wooden pivot which is set into a stone embedded in the mud floor. I notice the wheel has the remains of a white pattern painted on the surface and ask what it is. On the day of

Right: Rhiju finishing the rim of the water pot carefully – this part will not be altered during the next beating stage.

Below: Water pots made by Rhiju and Bimla have been filled at the village water pump.





Rhiju and his brother Phinru working side by side on the veranda. The newly thrown pots on the right will be beaten into two and a half times their size in three stages. During this time they will be continually minded to ensure each side is turned towards the sun and dried evenly.

Diwali (festival of lights) the wheel is decorated with a paste made from rice flour by Bimla Devi, then a *puja* is performed with offerings of flowers, incense, rice and sweets. Potters everywhere in India believe their wheels and tools are gifts from the gods. Righu performs a similar *puja* to his wheel at the start of the throwing season in recognition of, and gratitude to, its power to create thousands of vessels over the years and so provide his family with their livelihood.

He squats in front of his wheel on a cushion made of hessian sacking, turning it with a stick which engages into a hole in the rim – the momentum will be enough to throw one large pot or two small ones before he has to turn it again. The wheel spins at an angle, continually sloping one way or another and he has to compensate for this. He is a small man and beginning to show the signs of ageing, his spine curving and shoulders hunching from all the years bent forward, and the heavy cumbersome wheel appears disproportionately large beside him. He is throwing a slightly outwardly curving cylindrical form, finishing the neck and rim carefully as this part will not be altered during the later beating stage. He cuts the thick-walled pot with a thread and lifts it off the wheel, pressing it down onto a large leaf from the *kraal* tree.

He cleans the excess clay off the wheelhead and compresses it down into the bottom of the thrown pot – this extra thickness at the bottom will be beaten upwards at the next stage.

Every potter needs an assistant and Surender, Righu's son, moves the pots outside, pressing a thumbmark onto the sides facing the sun and from time to time turning them to ensure even drying. After throwing 25 pots, Righu cleans the wheelhead and leans the wheel against the wall, storing the pole and tools in the wooden roof rafters. Everything here is scrupulously neat and tidy, the small working and storing areas clean and uncluttered. Two baskets contain the various beating paddles and stones, sherd sifters are stacked in several sizes on a shelf alongside a neat pile of *kraal* leaves, and the wooden bats for beating the dry clay are propped against the wall. Meanwhile Phinru Ram is beating the pots he threw yesterday, assisted by his daughter-in-law. He likes to work with his hookah (water pipe) beside him and from time to time sucks the mouth and inhales deeply.

At 2.30pm we are led back down the steps to the house past the village well where a group of Rhigu's pots are being filled with water by a neighbour. We are given lunch in the downstairs room which is their bedroom (the kitchen is

upstairs to discourage animals looking for food) and Bimla Devi serves us *roti* (flattened bread), *dahl* (lentils), vegetables and her homemade mango pickle. Eating with them becomes a much enjoyed daily routine and enables us to talk to the women of the house who can interact more freely without men around. In many parts of India it is traditional for women to adopt the state of *purdah* (covering the head with a veil in the presence of men) and keep up an appearance of shyness with strangers, but as soon as we are alone with them barriers drop and they are keen to gossip and ask questions about us. Their biggest area of curiosity lies around our marital status and how many children we have.

Day 2

Again we enter the village to the steady sound of wooden paddles hitting clay. This time both brothers are sitting side by side engaged in the same process of beating; Righu is working on the pots he threw yesterday and Phinru Ram is giving his pots their second beating. The large pots require three rounds of beating in order to expand into the required size; the smaller ones require two rounds. Righu squats on a woven straw mat with hessian sacking spread before him under the beating area and dampens the inside and outside surfaces of the pot with a wet cloth. He supports it in a fired bowl and begins the beating process using a thick carved wooden paddle which is slightly concave to encourage the spherical form of the pot. Inside he holds a stone shaped like a cottage loaf moving it to match the area he is hitting with the paddle. Spread before him on the ground are a selection of paddles and stones of different sizes and weights, of shapes and dimensions. Heavier paddles are used for the first round, becoming lighter for each successive beating. To one side of him on the ground is a wet cloth. He passes the paddle across the cloth each time before beating, starting at the bottom of the pot and working upwards, while turning the pot in the bowl.

Rhiju places the pot into a sitter (a waterpot sherd) and continues the beating action – alternating up and down, thinning the clay from the bottom to the widest part across the middle, filling in cracks with moist clay as they appear. Next he uses the stone to beat the inside against the sitter, first dipping it into crushed stone powder to stop it sticking. Sometimes he turns the pot in the sitter, using the concave shape of the sitter like a template to shape the outside of the pot.

This family are very proud of their work and consider it to be of a superior standard to that of other potting communities. Through the fairs and demonstrations they have attended in major cities, organised by Mini Singh, they have been able to compare their work with others on a national level too. They spend much more time refining and finishing

than other potters I have watched, and although the work is arduous, Righu, Bimla and Surender approach it with love, reverence and a certain joy. Their approach manifests itself in the quality of the finished pots. Righu tells me that the shapes and techniques of making, clay preparation and firing have remained the same since his father taught him. Over the years, the marriage of material, function and form has been refined to maximise efficiency to such an extent that nothing is wasted whether human action, raw material or square inch of working space.

Recently it has become fashionable in Delhi for the middle classes to serve vegetables in unglazed earthenware vessels. Urban taste can create demand and new much needed markets for the traditional potter. We discussed this phenomena with Righu and he disappeared into a store room returning with some 'modern' pots he had made to fulfil an order of 400 dishes, 200 with lids. Compared with his usual work they were heavy, crude and vulgar with ill-considered incised patterns covering the surface. Although this order could be repeated he has decided to decline any further invitations, as he well knows they are of inferior quality. Compared to other members of his caste he is relatively well off. Most potters are in no position to turn down orders from the craft emporia whose shelves, crammed with commercial earthenware, misrepresent the beauty of traditional work like this.

Day 3

The family are working towards a deadline, preparing pots to be sold at the *mela* (fair) on 25th March to celebrate the festival of *Holi* which signifies the beginning of summer. It is unseasonably rainy and cold which is holding up production by affecting the drying time and also causing anxiety about the scheduled firing next week. We are visiting other potters in the area and there is a collective stress about the weather and uncertainty that work will be ready on time.

Today the second and third round of beating should take place but if the sun fails to appear, the last stage will be postponed until tomorrow. Righu is looking up at the sky forlornly and predicts more rain on the way, complaining that the weather is not good for working. He has already beaten half of the 25 pots assisted by Surender when we arrive. He places a new pot in a larger sized sitter (as the pot's dimensions will increase) and starts beating at the shoulder with a slightly lighter weight paddle, elongating the original shape. The action is gentler now; during the first round the clay was whacked hard, but now the rhythm has changed to seven pats of less intensity before the pot is moved again in the sitter. He is moving the clay from the shoulder down to the widest part across the middle and now the shape is changing back from egg to sphere.



Righu and Surender engaged in the second stage of beating using sherd sitters for support. Spread before them on the ground are a selection of paddles and stones of different sizes and weights to match the variety of vessel shapes and dimensions. These tools are also matched to the appropriate beating stage; heavier paddles are used for the first round, becoming lighter for each successive beating. Water is used to keep the paddle moist and stone powder to stop the stone sticking to the inside.

We sit and watch as he completes the batch and I ask about the indigenous wild animals – I have heard there are leopards living in the area. He tells us of several recent incidents between these animals and villagers. A year ago a local woman was awarded 2,000 rupees by the government for bravery for attempting to save a young shepherd boy, grabbing the back legs of the leopard which attacked and killed him. Righu remembers similar occasions during his childhood of leopards coming into the villages to attack domestic animals. Now because it is a protected species the government gives compensation for lost livestock.

From time to time Bimla brings us tea and is surprised that we decline her offer of mixing it with her precious supply of buttermilk on the grounds that it is too rich. They own three buffalo which provide them with milk and clarified butter – considered to be an important part of their diet ‘to keep up our strength for the hard work, especially beating the clay’. As I share their profession, I find it difficult to spend so much time engaged in the passive activity of

watching and recording rather than making and doing and sometimes want to work beside them; the constraints of time prevent this.

The skies remain cloudy and the potters decide to prepare a new batch of clay. Beating tools are tidied away and the ground swept carefully to get rid of any impurities. An equal mixture of red and yellow hard rocky clays are brought out from the storeroom behind and placed onto some stones which are permanently semi-embedded in the mud floor. Righu selects a wooden beater resembling a crudely carved cricket bat and begins to pound the clay against the stone in great swinging forceful movements; when he becomes tired Surender takes over and they alternate like this until the clay lumps have become fine. Within minutes the air is filled with clay dust. Now Righu sweeps the clay powder into a heap and begins to sieve it, putting the remaining lumps into a basket. About 5% of local river sand is added and the heap is formed into a ring. Now water is slowly added into the middle of the ring and the dry clay is gradually pushed

and incorporated into it. Lastly Surender wedges the mound systematically with his feet and carries it into the storeroom where it is kept under plastic sheets.

Day 4

Today when we arrive Righu's youngest son, who is married to Lalita, has arrived from Gujarat where he works as a clerk, returning home just once a year for a month. Lalita looks very happy to see him and is preparing the house for the family priest to come and perform a *puja* for the good health of the baby who has been losing weight lately. The mud walls inside have been decorated with painted designs and the family are wearing their best clothes. For the *puja* there are all kinds of ingredients laid out upon a low table including offerings of milk, curd, ghee, sugar, honey, uncooked rice, flowers and coconut. The family sit on the floor in front of the table, the priest beginning to perform the rituals with great speed, moving the ingredients around and assembling them in different combinations, each action symbolic and heavily imbued with religious significance. While he is constantly reading mantras and prayers from an ancient text, Bimla is playing with the baby and talking to us. It is a mixture of solemnity and informality which is characteristic of worship in any Hindu temple or ceremony.

Many of the votive rituals practised by Hindus involve the use of earthenware vessels. Bimla describes the festival of *Karva Chauth* when all married women, especially in Northern India, fast for a day in order to procure longevity for their husbands. *Karva Chauth* takes place in October one moon cycle before *Diwali*, and requires a clay pot called *Karva*, which will be filled with sweetmeats and female symbols of adornment such as bangles, a comb, a ribbon and khol eyeliner. The *Karva* will be given to her mother-in-law, sister-in-law, or if she has neither, to her husband. For the five days before the festival the entire market is chaos, with hundreds of women buying pots and the necessary items to fill them. A single potter in the town of Kangra can sell as many as 2,000 *Karva* on this occasion.

Later in the morning Righu begins his third round of beating which will further expand the pot to a thickness of 0.3cm (% in.) He is using a different action with the paddle, first wetting it on the cloth and then smoothing it across the surface to complete the shape. Now he smoothes the shoulder with his fingers and emphasises the angle of the neck with a wooden tool. However many thousands of times he has completed this making cycle, he still expresses a moment of satisfaction and pleasure as he finishes. He sets the pot down to dry in the sun having stretched an amorphous lump of clay into an almost perfect taut spherical form.

We walk over to the courtyard in front of his house where Bimla Devi has started to paint the pots with slip. Within every family of potters there are strict divisions of labour and here her primary contribution is helping with the firing and decorating the pots. Her sister-in-law is sitting on a *charpoy* in the communal courtyard area, watching her grandchildren and making paint brushes with dried grasses collected from the cotton plant called *kaas*. She breaks the stalks 7.5cm (3in.) from their feathery tips which once held seeds, and ties the ends together with cotton to form an excellent decorating brush. The rest of the grass she will use later to make a sweeping brush.

Bimla is using a red terra sigillata slip and I ask her how it is made. Righu travels on the bus to Dharamsala (about 30km/18 miles away) and digs the clay found in vertical lines on the mountain slopes. He brings about 20kg (44lbs) back in a sack; this quantity will last a year. After soaking the clay for 15 to 20 days the top layer is siphoned off, providing the slip which is kept in a large clay container outside the house.

Bimla is squatting on the ground with about 30 medium-sized waterpots lined up against the wall. Once she had to combine decorating with all the household duties of child rearing, cooking, cleaning, washing and taking care of the animals and crops. Now Lalita, her daughter-in-law, has taken over much of the housework so she can approach life in a more leisurely way. It is traditional for girls to move in with their in-laws at the time of marriage; some are treated little better than slaves but here there is a relaxed relationship between the two women. Before Bimla puts her hand into the container to mix up the slip she washes it thoroughly, as any residue of oil or cooking spice would ruin it. Now she selects a pot and spins it on a wooden board, supporting it with her thumb inside and fingers outside, and with the other hand she dips a cloth into the slip and applies it over the surface. The process is complete within 5 seconds. Bimla Devi is 54 years old and has been spinning pots for 40 years. Although she is from a family of potters, most of her skills have been learnt since her marriage to Righu at the age of 13. I have heard that in some areas the daughters of potters are kept deliberately uninformed about the skills and techniques of their fathers' profession lest they later impart the well-guarded secrets to their future in-laws, seen as possible competitors.

Day 5

We have not been able to come to the village for two days as it has been raining heavily. Today as we descend the path there is a new carpet of blue flowers covering the ground and everything looks fresh and green. We go straight to the house, where I hope Bimla will be decorating; she is squatting on the ground in the courtyard already applying

mustard oil to a group of pots with a rag, then polishing up the surfaces with a dry cloth. This is an alternative treatment to linear decoration and these pieces will remain plain. She complains that because the sunshine is still weak she cannot achieve a high lustre. Her target is to decorate the further 25 waterpots sitting all around her to keep pace with her husband's beating quota. There are white and black slips already made up in earthenware containers and a range of paintbrushes, some narrow, some wider and some with a gap in the middle to make a double line. The white and black clays are bought from a supplier in the local town of Kangra. Designs vary slightly from one area to another and here in the Kangra valley closely spaced diagonal hatching, rippling lines, cross and loop patterns and grid patterns, which go back to the Harappan period, are common.

Using the same hand action to spin the pot as when applying the terra sigillata slip, she begins by dividing the surface into horizontal bands with the black slip – one halfway down and two more below. These bands can be formed from straight and/or wavy lines and are used by decorators all over India as a basic design framework for the waterpot. Now Bimla begins to divide up the shoulder into vertical lines and within each area applies a wealth of linear designs and dots, randomly changing colour as she continually turns the pot on the ground. Some of the designs are abstract and some represent birds and fish but she never hesitates, working continuously, her sense of spacing instinctive. The quality of line is fine and delicate and because of her speed of execution, has a character of spontaneity and freshness about it. Over the years she has developed her own vocabulary of marks but modestly shrugs off my line of questioning regarding her talent. However, as she has travelled with Righu, demonstrating at fairs throughout the country, she knows her painting skills are extremely fine and is enjoying our compliments and appreciation.

Before we leave we discuss the possibility of firing tomorrow. It is 18th March today and only one week before the *mela*, but unless weather conditions are perfect it will be postponed. The fuel and firing area have to be bone dry, and unexpected wind can cause breakage.

Day 6

Again, we were unable to come yesterday because of rain, but today it is sunny so we are optimistic. We turn the familiar corner by the water pump to see father and son squatting on the veranda beating, so we know they have decided not to fire today. If the conditions are not favourable, the entire load could be lost; this could be as many as 1,500 pots, representing two to three months' work. Firing in the open without any kind of shield or cover against the elements is

fraught with the highest risk factors; if the weather conditions are right he can expect 100% success rate but if a strong wind unexpectedly appears, in Righu's words, 'There can be firecrackers – sherds can even fly out of the pile'.

If it does suddenly become cloudy or rainy after the firing has started, he covers the whole pile with a tarpaulin and digs canals around the circumference to allow the water to drain away. Righu remembers this happening two years ago when he had to wait a day for the weather to clear up before continuing a firing. Postponing the firing could prevent him attending the *mela*. Although he generally does five firings a year he describes how he can divide the loads into smaller batches which are fired quickly, within two hours if necessary, literally dodging the clouds and rain. This knowledge is imperative to potters living in mountainous areas where weather is always unpredictable and can cause financial catastrophe by destroying stock or preventing participation at an important sales venue like a *mela*.

My own work has been directly influenced by this kind of firing technique. I think of all the many disasters I have encountered and the nail biting periods of time just before an important exhibition or craft fair when risk and uncertainty are at their highest. Clay as a material is difficult to control at all stages and the potter has to be constantly diligent from beginning to end, in order to avoid damage or breakage. The culminating fire which will turn plastic clay into permanent terracotta is the most hazardous operation of all.

Day 7

We have been forced to stay away for two days but now the skies are completely clear and the snow-capped peaks of the Himalaya can be seen in the distance, but by the time we arrive some clouds and haze have appeared. Righu, in a state of indecision, is discussing with his brother the weather predictions for the rest of the day. We sit on the *charpoy* in their courtyard playing with the baby while he continues to agonise until he suddenly invites us to follow him, having finally decided to go ahead with the firing. He leads us up past the working area where his brother has started to throw again, to the outskirts of the village where the firing site lies in between his vegetable patch and wheat field. It is surrounded by the fuel; huge piles of buffalo dung cakes stacked on pallets of brushwood to dry.

Using sacking, Surender is beginning to form a ring around the circumference of the firing area, to define the

Opposite: Bimla decorating with white and black slips using linear designs of cross and hoop patterns, grid patterns, rippling lines and closely spaced diagonal hatching which date from the Harappan period.



space and also help to contain the fuel during assemblage. The diameter is about 2.4m (8ft) wide so that the radius from the outside to the centre is an arm's length. Righu spreads a thin 1cm (½in.) layer of rice husk on the ground followed by a 7.5cm (3in.) thickness of pine needles which he continues to spread on the outside of the sacking. This will act as a cushion for the pots before they are placed inside the pile. Surender and Bimla start carrying the dried buffalo dung in baskets from a building at the edge of the vegetable patch which also acts as storage for their dried, unfired pots. My husband Kevin has joined me for three weeks and is helping too, providing much amusement at his attempts to balance the large baskets on his head. They will need about ten baskets full for today's comparatively modest firing of 200 pots.

Raw pots start appearing from the store, also carried to the site in baskets and lain carefully on the outer circumference of pine needles. Stacked up against the wall are piles of sherds of different sizes which Righu starts to sort out and turn to face the sun in order to warm them. He walks around the perimeter, continually inspecting and moving pots towards the sun direction which is acting as an efficient pre-heater. We are approaching midday now and the temperature is getting hot.

Lalita calls the men to lunch and a 30-minute break gives me a chance to review what has happened and sequence it properly. As usual in India after a period of frustrating inactivity, once action finally begins it proceeds at breakneck speed and it is easy to miss something. Earlier Righu broke some dung cakes into smaller pieces which Bimla is now

having difficulty igniting with dry straw before placing a burning piece into each of the big pots as a pre-heating precaution. In the summer when the sun is more powerful this would not be necessary. It is auspicious to put a piece of burning coal from a cremation site into the firing and as he places it at the centre he prays to god to, 'Please guard my pots safely'. Near by an old shoe is balanced on top of a pole embedded in the earth, to ward off the evil eye. It is believed that a disastrous firing the year before was as a



Bimla pouring pieces of burning buffalo dung into the pots to preheat them.



The beginning of the firing – Bimla spreading pine needles over a thin layer of rice husk. The success of the firing will depend on the assembling of pots and fuel and each stage is carried out with immense care and economy.



Pots are arranged in concentric circles in an inverted position, largest first, with mouths facing inward. Dried buffalo dung is used for fuel; this modest pile of 200 pots (numbers can reach 1,500) will require ten basketsfull. It is spread underneath, above and amongst the pots.

result of someone wishing him ill. The danger from envy or malevolence is much feared throughout India, illustrated by the slogan which appears on the back of many trucks in Himachal Pradesh: 'All you with evil thoughts – may your faces be black.' (Throughout India beauty is synonymous with light coloured skin.)

Righu places the largest pot on the flat ground in the middle and starts to arrange the next size all around it in an inverted position. The pots' mouths face the centre, each one carefully placed on a small piece of sherd (which matches the curve of the pot exactly). One pot overbalances and there is great alarm as there could be a knock-on effect through the whole pile, but fortunately no damage is done. Righu continues to arrange the pots in concentric rings around the middle putting pieces of dried dung in and around to hold them in place, whilst Bimla is inserting burning dung into the medium and smaller pots still outside the pile.

Earlier I had been watching a woman giving an old man a bath at the village pump; now he turns up wearing a snow-white turban and *dhoti* (length of cloth pulled up between the legs) and we discover he is Righu's uncle. The old man is 83 and just retired from pottery making last year.

He must have been instrumental in teaching Righu the art of arranging fuel and pots together and stands at the edge, bemused that we are taking so much interest in an activity considered by Indian society to be of such low status. Now Righu is building up several layers of the large waterpots, filling the gaps by inverting smaller differently shaped pots and continuing to place dung in and around them until the pile is waist high. The pile is covered with more dung cakes and Bimla begins to clear away the pine needles from around the sacking and piles them up against the side. Sherd are placed around the circumference and then built up to cover the pile, whole pot sherd around the bottom and curved broken pieces higher up where the pots are smaller. Their function is to prevent flames escaping during the firing.

Surender covers the outside with rice straw to a thickness of about 20cm (8in.) and Righu compresses it by beating it down with a bamboo pole. More baskets of straw are carried to the site by Bimla, and Lalita appears with sweet tea for everyone. Righu sprinkles water on the ground around the circumference to prevent the fire spreading outwards, while Surender spreads the rest of the straw over the pile, beating it down again. Looking up at the sky which is completely

clear now he regrets his earlier caution saying, 'I could have done a bigger firing'.

Father and son compress the straw further with the underneath side of the empty baskets before finally covering the pile with ash to prevent the straw flying about. It has taken three hours to assemble and arrange the pots. Now Bimla is placing five chillies under the pile (the auspicious number is 5 or 7 or 9) to further ward off evil spirits. Righu makes an offering to *Shiva* of a mixture of ghee and sugar and as he lights the straw says 'I am offering this to *Shiva* for a good firing.' The pile is assembled and fired with the same careful methodical approach Righu applies to his pot making.

Surender and Righu take the burning straw and quickly walk around the pile, igniting the whole circumference. While it begins to smoke they continue compressing the straw to keep the flames inside, to ensure that it will burn slowly. Now Righu sprinkles ash on the parts where the flame is escaping and will tend it in this way for the next two hours while the dung gradually ignites and burns down. Lalita comes to fetch the teacups and as she passes Kevin gestures to me that she approves of him by putting her thumb and index finger together in a ring shape – the kind of universal communication that does not need an interpreter.

Day 8

At the firing site Bimla is brushing ash from the pots into a basket which will be re-used in the next firing. Surender joins her and starts to extract pots from the pile, knocking each one to test whether it is cracked, his diagnosis made on the vibration rather than the sound. The high pitch of the ring indicates the temperature must have reached nearly 1,000°C (1,832°F), much higher than most traditional earthenware in India. Only one pot cracked, an extremely impressive result.

We go back to the courtyard for tea and discuss how the work is marketed. The centuries old *jajmani* system of barter still exists here wherein potters are bound to exchange with the landowners vessels for grain. Righu supplies a selection of cooking, water and ritual pots twice a year to 18 of these local farmers (inherited from his father) and in return is given wheat, rice, hay for his animals and straw for his firing. Excess grain not required by the family will be used to barter further goods and services, such as hair cutting from the barber or carpentry.

Other work is collected by traders and resold in shops and markets, and some is sold directly by the family at the *melas*. Potters in this area work around the religious festivals



The pile is covered with sherds to retain the heat, then a thick layer of compressed rice straw followed by ash to prevent the flame from escaping. After making an offering of ghee and sugar to *Shiva* to ask for a successful firing, Righu and Surender ignite the pile with burning straw.



Unpacking the following day. Bimla brushes ash off the pots into a basket which will be reused and Surender knocks each pot to test for cracking. The high pitch of the ring indicates the temperature must have reached nearly 1,000°C (1,832°F) and there was only one casualty – a remarkable achievement.



Ram Kishan's kiln at Dheera, Kangra district. It is a horseshoe construction made from river stones covered with a mixture of mud and cowdung. Despite bad weather, Ram Kishan took a risk to complete an order deadline but towards the end of the firing, torrential rain caused half the load to crack. The potter took a philosophical attitude 'It's the sacrifice to the kiln – it's happened many times.'



Ram Kishan's eldest son unloading pots from a black firing at Dheera, Kangra district. Four oil drums are placed inside the kiln during a normal oxidised firing, each containing 50–60 pieces. Resinous wood from the *cheel* tree is placed inside with the pots and the lid sealed with clay. These pots survived the disastrous firing as they were protected from the rain.



A range of Ram Kishan's blackfired pots for cooking and containing liquids and foodstuffs.

when there is a demand to replace water and cooking vessels and for ceremonial clay objects. For example, clay oil lamps are bought at *Diwali* in November; at *Holi* waterpots are replaced, and on *Shankranti*, just before the wheat harvest in April, large pots are bought by the farmers in order to offer water to their dead ancestors.

I am curious about the logistics of transportation and learn that the first stage is to carry pots up the steep path to the road and from there the journey proceeds by bus and train. There are no mules or donkeys here and each day as we enter and leave the village we pass villagers hauling huge bundles of goods up and down in traditional carrying mode upon the head. Surender and Bimla have loaded a selection

of pots straight from the firing into rope nets ready for the *mela*. These nets are made by Righu's uncle and can carry 12 large or 25 smaller pots, their advantage over the traditional basket for transportation is twofold. They can contain greater bulk and invite fewer attempts at the ever present threat of theft on a bus or train journey. Two people can carry six net-loads to a fair, in this way totalling as many as 140 pots. A journey like this will be repeated several times to build up stock during the week before the event.

Today is our last day here and we have arranged to take Righu and Surender in the taxi to the venue of the *mela* at Nagrota, a nearby town, in order to accompany the pots to their final destination. We follow the men up the path, barely keeping pace with them despite the heavy loads they are carrying on their heads. The pots are secured onto the roof of the taxi. The fair has already begun, many stall holders set up and selling everything from cheap manufactured plastic and clothes, to candy floss and brightly coloured traditional sweets. In the background is a ferriswheel and the usual fairground rides on dangerously ancient and unmaintained looking equipment. We find a space on the outskirts and start unloading, placing rows of assorted pots on the ground, and before long the sales start to take place. It is traditional for householders to replace their earthenware vessels at festival times such as this one of *Holi*. Replacing kitchen utensils is considered auspicious, symbolising a new beginning. As we leave I see women walking away carrying their new purchases, unaware of the many processes and hours involved in creating such a humble but necessary everyday object such as a waterpot.

Rhiju does not make any votive work (apart from ritual vessels for death, birth and marriage ceremonies) but tells us about a local tradition involving the worship of unfired figures in a spring festival called *Rali Shankar*. During March *Rali Shankar* is celebrated throughout the Kangra region to commemorate the mythological story of the death of a young woman called Rali. She was engaged to a much younger boy and was only informed of this on her wedding day. Overcome with grief and shame she committed suicide but before she died she asked god to be considerate to young girls in their search for a bridegroom. At the festival, figures of Lord *Shiva* and his wife *Parvati* are worshipped by young unmarried girls in order to secure themselves a suitable husband. Many of the women we talk to in Righu's village participated in this ceremony when they were girls, some as many as twelve times before marriage. Girls who are unable to afford to buy a statue would make one themselves.

After some investigation we find Prakash Chand who lives in the town of Kangra and makes these statues. He is not a member of the *Kumbhar* caste, but is a painter by trade, who decorates walls with mythological scenes for weddings.



Pairs of hand modelled *Shiva* and his wife *Parvati* drying for the *Rali Shankar* festival celebrated in Kangra to commemorate the death of *Rali*. On her wedding day *Rali* discovered her husband was much younger than her and committed suicide out of shame.

Right: Different sizes of *Shiva* and *Parvati* decorated with commercial paints (unfired). After the ceremony they will be immersed in water to dissolve and once more become part of the earth from where they came.

When we arrive he is in full production with hundreds of pairs of the couple *Shiva* and *Parvati* in various stages of production. The figures are made from a combination of pressmoulding and modelling techniques and when thoroughly dry are painted with bright commercial colours. In keeping with the story, *Parvati* is always made taller than *Shiva* and they are sold in several sizes in the market. Young girls buy a pair and worship them for ten consecutive days by bathing, anointing, clothing and embellishing them with jewels (much like a Western girl would play with dolls). At the end of the period the couple are ceremoniously married with feasting, music and all the rituals performed in a real wedding. After marriage, *Shiva* and *Parvati* are immersed in water in a local river or lake. They will dissolve and return to the earth from where they came, to be resurrected the following year when the festival of *Rali Shankar* comes round once again. We are told there is much weeping as the young girls say goodbye to their statues which have been so lovingly looked after.





Maharashtra

Maharashtra is one of India's largest states, both in terms of area and population. It is bordered by the Arabian sea along its western coast, by Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh to the north and Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh to the south. The small town of Vara lies close to the river Vaitarna about 90km (55 miles) north of Bombay, surrounded by flat farmland stretching towards the silhouettes of distant hills. Rice and chickpea are the main crops, but the recently changed use of land from agricultural to industrial in the area will have a dramatic impact.

On the edge of Vara is a potters' community where ten families are still engaged in production mostly carried out by women, their men having gone into factory work or other trades for the usual reasons of diminishing markets. These will shrink even further with the development of industry. Most houses here are constructed from bamboo covered with mud, compressed mud floors and clay tiled roofs, the more affluent families using fired bricks as a building material. Shade is provided by bamboo trees surrounding, and dotted amongst, the houses. From the edge of the colony it is possible to look down through the trees to a flat area $\frac{1}{2}$ km away, where a group of families are engaged in brick making. Within the potter caste there are many sub-castes, creating a strong sense of status and hierarchy. These potters consider themselves socially superior to the brickmakers, many of whom are itinerant labourers moving around with their families to make bricks in the dry season or to work as field labourers during the monsoon.

There are many factors affecting the potter's position in this hierarchy, ranging from geographic (potters living near sacred places gaining respectability position over potters living in socially inferior areas) to technological (the superiority of potters using the wheel to those working with simple tools). In *Pottery Making Cultures and Indian Civilisation*, the Indian anthropologist Baidyanath Saraswati describes some of the prejudices between potters:

Certain potter communities from Uttar Pradesh consider all other potters who use human or goat's hair or pig fur in the



construction of the wheel, and temper clay by donkey's dung, as ritually inferior. These potters only use coconut fibre and jute for preparing the wheel, and sand for tempering clay. Similar prejudice has been found about the use of garbage as fuel for the kiln, detaching the pot from the wheel by means of a wire, beating pots on a goat skin, use of a paint brush made of donkey's mane, and even making black pottery in the localities where that is taboo for the Hindus.

The issue of caste fuels a sense of social injustice not only to those below but also towards those above. Many of the potters I meet throughout India complain of their lack of preferential treatment under the government quota systems, despite their low economic status. There is a teacher living here in the colony whose parents are potters and he is happy to explain their plight to us. Potters are from the fourth caste of artisans called *Sudra*, categorised by the government as

Opposite: One of the grain storage pots standing outside Shoba's mud and bamboo house in Vara, Maharashtra. The hand prints are a traditional form of wall decoration, applied at festival times.

'Other Backward Castes' and below them are the *Dalits* (Untouchables) and Tribals both of whom are labelled as 'Scheduled Castes'. There are government quotas to give positive discrimination to the scheduled castes for education, employment and loans; these, however, overlook the potter community which feels it is being marginalised. The situation is similar to that experienced in the USA where the government gave preferential treatment to Blacks, causing discontent within other interest groups.

A person's caste is immediately recognisable through his surname. Some Untouchables and Tribals, in order to circumvent this stigma, have converted to Christianity or Buddhism and can adopt a new name. However, I observed in the potters' village of Duvaradimanai in Tamil Nadu that a group of Untouchables who had converted to Christianity remained living on the edge of the village and were still alienated from the rest of the community despite the church and crosses they had erected.

It is February and the potters in Vara are in full production, making a range of different sized water and grain storage pots for the approaching *Shivratri* festival (to celebrate the wedding of *Shiva* and *Parvati*). Pots have been ordered by traders who will come and collect them in a truck and resell in various markets. Traditions demand that the

renewal of clay food containers to mark each important event in a person's life should also coincide with religious festivals. Although the porosity of earthenware vessels is ideal for storing and cooking food, they become contaminated through continual use and need to be replaced, the broken sherds returning to the earth from which they were created in a perfect cycle.

As any potter knows, clay is a difficult material to work with, and requires much experience and skill to turn the plastic mass into a vessel or sculpted form. Each stage of its process is fraught with its own risks and potential dangers, compounded by a reliance on the weather. Wind, rain and lack of sunshine will thwart, postpone and even ruin the drying and firing. Scarcity of basic materials is becoming a common problem for Indian potters and in Vara, at the time of my visit, the problem was a scarcity of horse manure which is a crucial addition to the raw clay. I recorded the various techniques used from several families in the colony and they all complained of production being held up.

The making season here is October–May; during the monsoon the potters will supplement their lack of income by working for local farmers in the paddy fields. Clay is dug from a site 2km (1½ mile) away and delivered by bullock cart. Before clay preparation begins a *puja* is done where incense



Clay Preparation. A narrow mouthed pot covered in holes is plunged into the soaking pit of clay/horse dung mixture. On withdrawal the lumps are sieved out and the smooth slip thrown onto the ash spread out upon the ground.

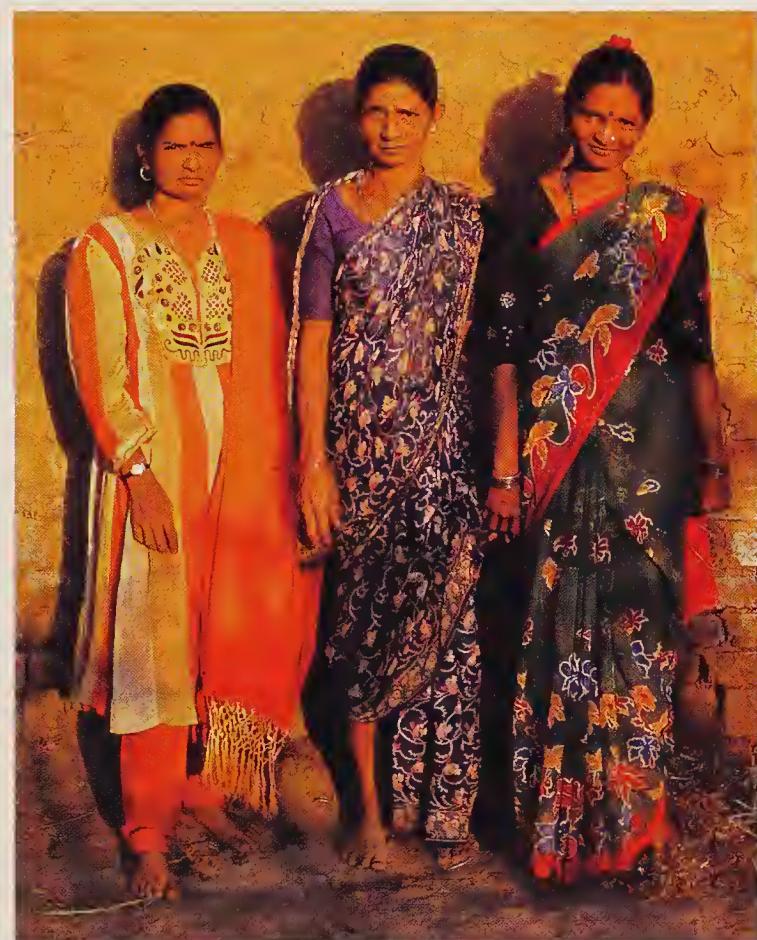
and flowers are offered in the family shrine to ask for a blessing from god. Four parts of clay are mixed with two parts of sieved horse dung and one of sieved ash. The dung is prepared in the same way as described in Rajasthan; beaten and sieved with the unpleasant by-product of high levels of dust which it is impossible to avoid inhaling. First the sieved ash is spread on the ground, then the clay and sieved dung put into a hollow container set into the ground and mixed with water until the consistency of thin cream. Each area has developed its own techniques for clay preparation depending on the quality of the clay and local materials available for temper, and I have not seen this method used elsewhere. A narrow-mouthed pot covered in holes is plunged into the pit of soaking slip and withdrawn, the holes sieving out the lumps, before the smooth slip is thrown onto the ash. This procedure is repeated until a substantial amount of clay has been prepared, then the sieved clay is mixed with the ash and wedged by foot, formed into a large mound and covered with plastic.

There is a family of women here completing an order for a range of terracotta urns. During the coming festival a charity will feed large numbers of people free of charge and the largest of these urns will be filled with drinking water to be used at the feast. Other sizes will be sold for grain storage

and to contain drinking water in temples. Shoba, a young woman in her 20s, lives with her widowed mother, widowed sister and children, an unmarried sister and brother. Shoba has recently returned from a violent marriage to live in the parental home and there is a lot of resentment from her family about the dowry payment. India is a patriarchal society; a bride entering her new home is powerless in the face of maltreatment, subservient to her husband and mother-in-law. Most potters are economically disadvantaged and live in debt from the demands of dowries, funeral rites and other ritual expenses, the situation here being no exception. The family took out a loan of 6,000 rupees from the government towards the 25,000 rupee dowry for Shoba (6,000 rupees represents a higher than average income for a potter). They are finding it impossible to repay, incurring higher and higher interest penalties whilst resenting the fact that Shoba will not be able to re-marry, but will add to the drain on their resources. She is in a hopeless position, one which many Indian women must suffer. The option of returning home from an abusive marital situation as Shoba has done is not available to most Indian women.

The containers are made in batches in a kind of mini-production line, and while the older sister is finishing off the rims of six of the largest size, Shoba is beginning another three of the next largest size. Last night at 7pm she began three bases which she has already built up to 35cm (14in.) this morning and they are drying in the sun to be ready for the next stage. Three more already stand 90cm (35in.) high, beaten to their final shape and waiting for the addition of rims. By working on pots at several different stages, they can keep production continuous while the clay dries out enough for the next coil application or round of beating. They make six sizes ranging from 30cm (12in.) high to 1.05m (41in.) high as well as flowerpots using a mixture of pinching, coiling and beating techniques. An inverted iron dish (*tava*) is placed on a piece of wood on the ground, and a fired clay bat (*sancha*) is placed on the iron dish – the combination of these three acting as a kind of wheel which can be rotated with the feet.

Shoba sprinkles water then ash on to the bat, takes a lump of soft clay, beats it with her knuckle to form a disc shape and places it on the bat. She takes another handful of clay and beats it into the bottom with her knuckles. Now she raises the wall by pulling the thick clay upwards to form a cylinder shape while rotating the disc with her foot. Women potters in India have a natural grace and ease expressed through an economy of movement from years of repeated actions. Raised in an environment where the home is also the studio they learn from a young age to play with the clay and imitate their mothers and older siblings (or fathers in the case of boys) in clay preparation, making, decorating and selling. Born into the *Kumbhar* caste, Shoba comes from many



From right to left: Shoba, her mother, and Mira her younger sister.

generations of potters who have refined form, function and materials to a maximum level of efficiency and economy. Her ancestral knowledge is strong and instinctive. Through economic necessity the ingredient of speed has to be added to their skills and Shoba's older sister proudly tells us at her peak she could make ten large grain containers a day before rheumatism slowed down her production.



Top: Shoba sprinkles water then ash onto the bat, takes a lump of soft clay, beats it with her knuckle to form a disc shape and places it on the bat. She begins to raise the wall by pulling the thick clay upwards to form a cylinder shape while rotating the bat with her foot.

Above: Shoba squeezes the soft clay into a thick three inch coil and 'feeds' it along the edge of the cylinder while rotating the bat with her foot so that both hands are free to work the clay.

Now Shoba squeezes the soft clay into a thick 7.5cm (3in.) coil and 'feeds' it along the edge of the cylinder, rotating the bat with her foot so that both hands are free to work the clay. After adding another coil she pulls the clay upwards with the index finger and thumb to about 1.25cm (½ in.) thick while the other hand supports the wall on the outside. Within five minutes the cylinder has grown 30cm (12in.) high. She sprinkles ash onto the rim, then water, and adds two more coils before once again pulling the thick clay up into a thin wall. As the pot begins to grow it is too heavy to turn with her foot, so she walks around it, first clockwise then anti-clockwise.

The clay walls are still soft and will need to stiffen in the sun before she can continue. The strength of the sun here means that potters have to be constantly diligent, turning their work frequently to avoid overdrying and cracking.

The sun is very much part of the potters' life. They are companions. In fact, the word *Prajapati*, lord of the people, is used for both the sun and the potter. Both are creators! Day and night and in all the different seasons he has to watch for the sun and then he has to play-work with its light and shade. He knows just by touch, exactly how much the heat, moisture and elasticity of the pots and figurines which he makes. Then, only when it is rightly sunbaked does he put them in the kiln. He has to know the nights too. Just by hearing the whistling of the wind, he gets up and takes care of his objects. So the potter knows intimately the parts of the day and night with his inner sense.

(Haku Shah in *Form and Many Forms of Mother Clay*)

Later two more coils are added and pulled up until the height grows to about 75cm (2.5ft), the shape now flaring out from the bottom, its top diameter wider than its base. Meanwhile production has to stop because they have run out of prepared clay and without the horsedung they cannot make more. The local supply has dried up and they will have to locate another source. There are now many pots on the veranda and outside in the sunshine; these will have to be wrapped in sacking to prevent further drying until the new batch of clay is made. A day of inactivity and enquiries leads them to hear of a possible new source some distance away and two of the sisters hitch a ride in a truck to investigate this new location. The mission is successful, they collect the manure free of charge in sacks and return with the truck, this time paying for delivery.

The beating stages can proceed and Shoba uses several weights and sizes of wooden paddles with a stone anvil. She walks one way and then the other, systematically beating the walls to change the crude cylindrical shape into a refined vessel form. The beating, like the building, is carried out in several stages, allowing the walls to dry out in between. She continually dips the paddle and stone into water and, where



Shoba walks one way and then the other around the pot, systematically beating the walls with a wooden paddle and stone anvil until the crude cylindrical shape turns into a refined vessel form. The paddle has been designed to beat around the flat edge where the pot stands on the ground.

the clay cracks, overlaps the tear and compresses the clay again with the beater. Beating will thin the wall to between 8 to 13mm (0.3 to 0.5in.) thick and increase the size considerably. A decorative coil is added at the level of the shoulder and incised to form a pattern. Finally Shoba joins another coil around the opening and squeezes it to form the rim, refining it by pressing it into shape with a wet cloth whilst walking round the pot several times, first one way and then the other. It resembles a thrown rim in its symmetry.



The vessel has been beaten smooth, and now Shoba adds the final coil which will form the rim.

Red iron clay is bought from the market and made into a slip (*gheru*) which is applied with a cloth a few hours before firing. Beans from the *arita* tree are threaded into several strands resembling a necklace, then dipped into kerosene and rubbed over the surface of the slipped pots to give a burnish. There is no tradition of decorating in this village. Maybe there is not sufficient time to use embellishment because the making is solely carried out by women and not shared with their men.



Sigri (mud stoves) are made in two sizes – single or double. These simple unfired stoves are used throughout villages in India, their designs changing slightly from area to area.

Shoba's younger sister Mira has left school but failed her exams and has not been able to find a job. She contributes to the family business by making mud stoves (*sigri*) in two sizes – single or double – and selling them directly to local customers. These simple stoves are used throughout India in the villages, their designs changing slightly from area to area. Fuel (dried agricultural waste, leaves, tree bark, wood or whatever is available) is stoked underneath and the terracotta cooking pot sits on top, becoming blackened with time. The stoves are sold raw (unfired) and will gradually become fired through use. They are maintained by a regular coating of liquid cowdung and clay mix until their contours merge into the kitchen, becoming a continuation of the walls and floor which are covered with the same mixture. (The dung of the cow has antiseptic qualities and is believed to be ritually cleansing).

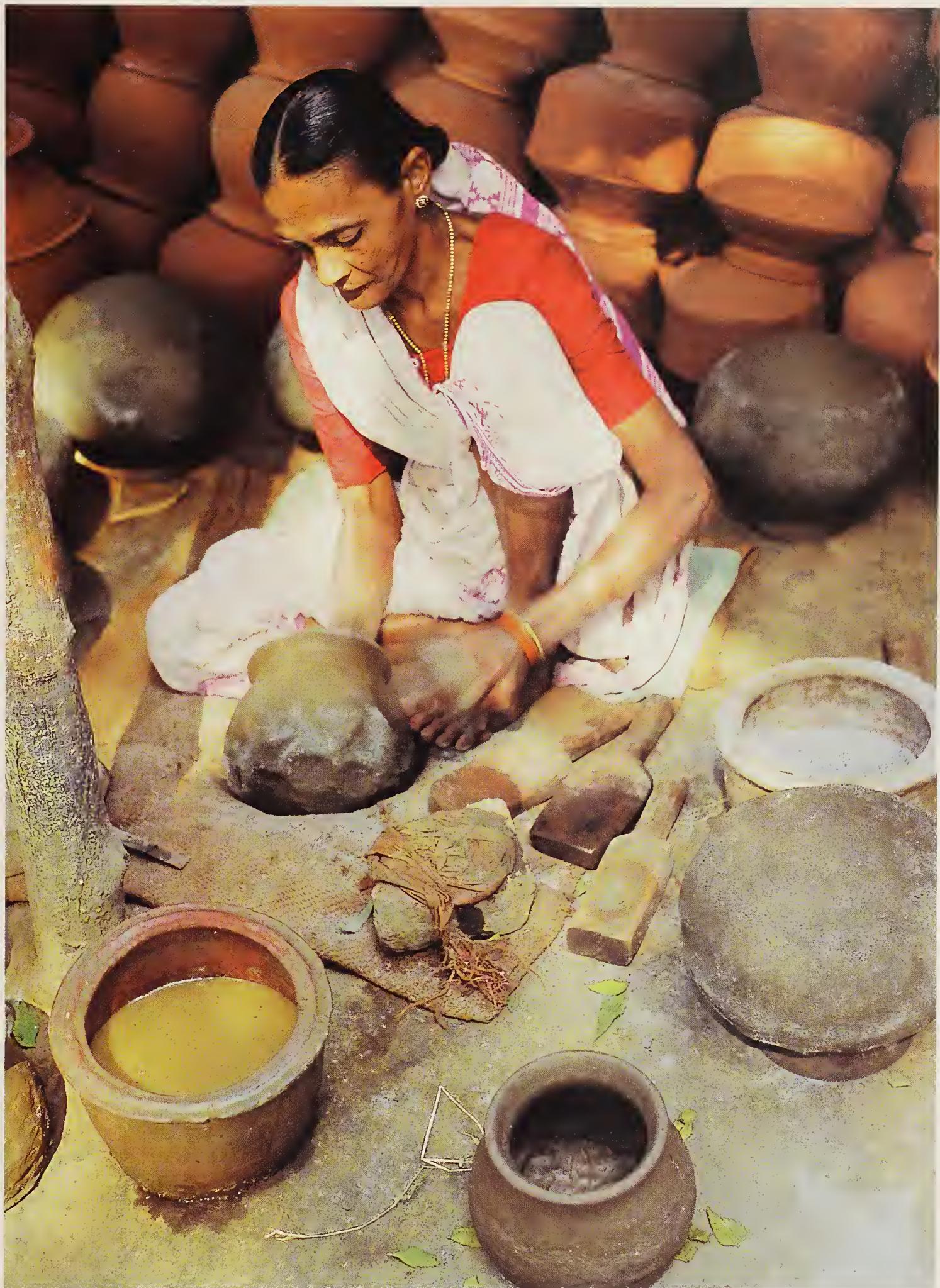
Mira sweeps the ground clean outside her house and kneads the clay (which has been mixed with the remains of the coarse horsedung fibre) on a piece of sacking. She builds a solid shape to a height of about 15cm (6in.) high and 38cm² (15in².) around a metal paintcan and neatens the top by running a wooden ruler across the surface. Using the ruler to mark out the exact size of the stove, she cuts the sides straight with a metal spade-like tool and tidies up the edges with the ruler. She removes the paintcan, revealing a cylindrical hole which will become the stoking chamber, and builds up three solid mounds around its edge which will

support the cooking pot. The stove is left in the sun to stiffen and then Mira, with the spade tool, cuts a door into the wall through which the fuel will be stoked. She works on four or five stoves together and tells us they will last about a year before cracking and requiring replacement.

Other women in the community are making various sizes of waterpots plus pots for collecting, fermenting and containing alcohol made from sugar cane, as well as the usual range of ritual pots for death and wedding ceremonies. Pots from the village are sold in a variety of ways; through traders, bartered with Tribals for wood and sold directly to locals from the workshop. Twice a year after harvest the potting family hires a bullock cart which is loaded with pots and driven through the villages, exchanging pots for grain.

The range of pots produced by other women in the community here are made using a similar technique to Shoba's method for the large urn. Round-bottomed pots are supported in a hollow in the ground and covered with sacking during the beating stage. The rim is finished in the same way with a wet cloth, but carried out before the beating

Opposite: Round bottomed water pots are pinched then beaten in a depressed hollow in the ground lined with sacking. Ash is sprinkled on the pot to prevent sticking and the paddle drawn periodically across a wet rag resting upon a stone in order to keep the clay moist. It is crucial for the potter to control exactly how moist or dry the clay has to be at each stage of making.



stages happen. During the week I spend here I naively think I might learn the rudiments of beating a pot, as I would like to incorporate it into my own work. Despite my 15 years experience as a handbuilder (coiling is my main technique) I find it impossible to control the tools and clay. The women are happy to teach me and show patience as well as enormous enjoyment at the hilarity of my repeated failures. Finally one of them puts her hands over mine and beats the paddle with me, hoping her control of the pressure and rhythm will help. It doesn't and I have to give up, defeated. I would need to be her student for at least six months to master the skill.

Each extended family has its own firing pit, often shared by three or four households. The pit is a rectangular shape about 4.8m (189in.) long by 2.1m (83in.) wide, sloping to a depth of 1.05m (41in.) at the back and situated on the outskirts of the colony. Pots are spread out to warm in the late afternoon sun and the fuel, consisting of five bundles of rice straw, two bags of rice husk and four bundles of wood, has been purchased and brought to the firing site. In this village of women potters the firing is still the domain of men and one of their husbands begins to cover the floor of the pit with rice husk. He forms four furrows along the length of the pit, leaving a 30cm (12in.) gap in between to form the

stoking channels during the firing. His wife is igniting some buffalo dung in a pile of straw while he places bricks into the furrows. These will support the large urns and raise them from the ground, enabling the heat to circulate underneath.

Now he puts the lighted dung cakes into the furrows of rice husk at regular intervals (about every 60cm/2ft). The largest urns are placed carefully onto the bricks, slightly tilting backwards with their necks away from the front of the pit. While his elderly mother is bringing sherds to the site, he places four stacks of fired waterpots in line with the four rows of urns, leaving gaps in between. The gaps will become the stoking channels. His wife helps him to pack the rest of the pots, all inverted, placing them carefully on top of the urns before covering the pile with sherds. Now the pile is covered with rice straw which is beaten down with a bamboo pole to make it dense. A mixture of ash and rice husk is thrown over the pile to prevent the straw from flying away during the firing. Sticks are propped up vertically against the stoking holes and then the front also covered with rice straw. It is 6 pm and the sunset is turning the sky an intense cherry-red colour. The pile is left for 4½ hours pre-heating, during which time the burning dung cakes will slowly ignite the rice husk and pre-heat the pots.



Furrows of rice husk are formed in the bottom of the pit. The large urns are placed in between the furrows raised up on bricks to allow the heat to circulate underneath. Wood will be stoked in between the rows of pots once the rice husk has burnt away.

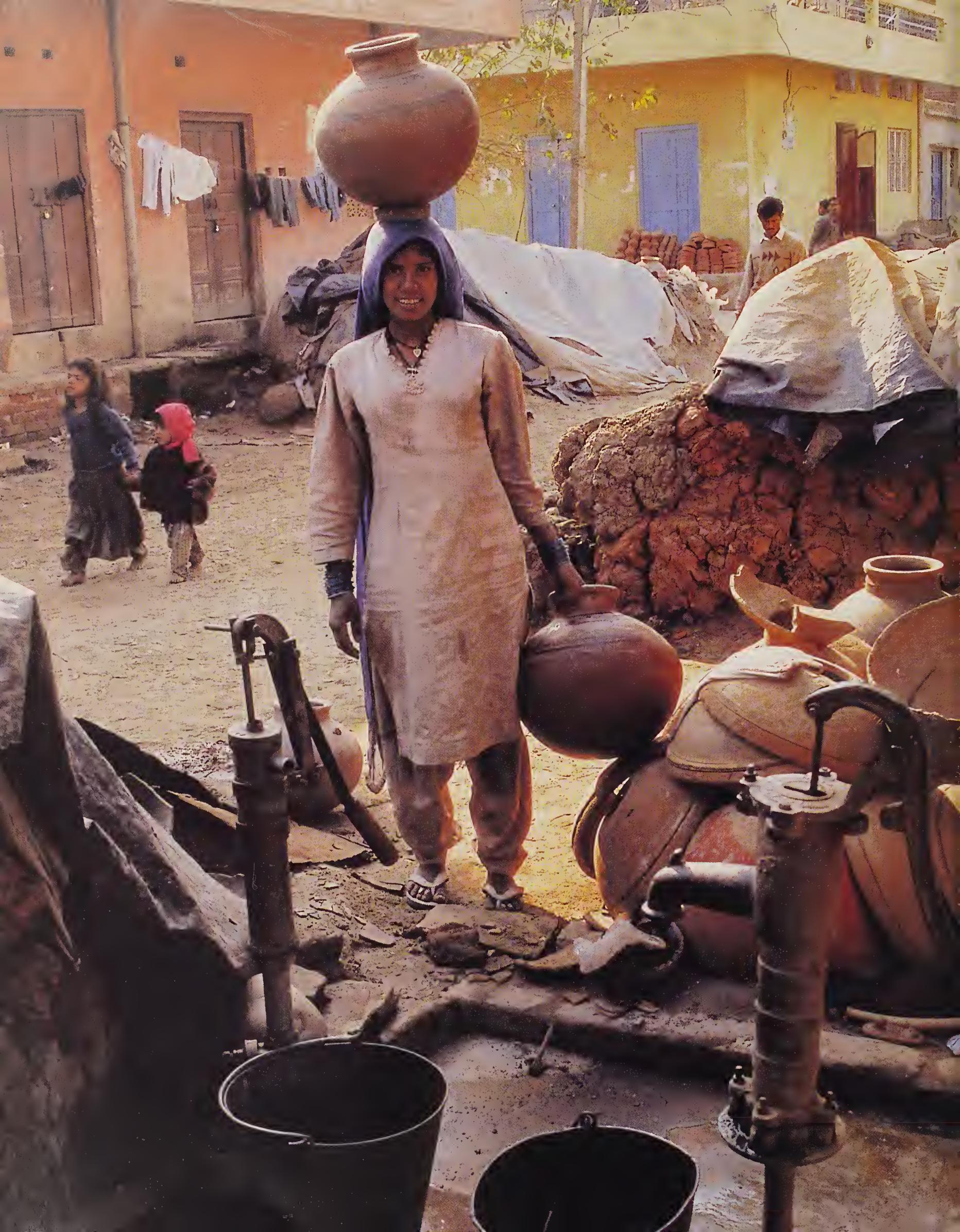


A firing pit in Vara has just been unloaded with storage vessels. It is half way between an open firing and an enclosed kiln firing; the three reinforced brick walls will conserve heat and help to protect the pots from the elements.

A *puja* is performed for the first firing of the season after the monsoon; a coconut is broken, incense lit, flowers offered and red vermillion powder dotted on the pile and the ground. The firing is carried out at night in order to gauge the temperature from the red glow, and we return at 11pm. The straw is ignited and bundles of wood gradually fed into the stoking holes – starting with the smallest lengths and gradually feeding in longer and longer pieces until after an hour the sticks are pushed right through to the back wall. In another 15 minutes they are satisfied with the colour at the

front of the pile and stop stoking, but the temperature is not high enough at the back so more wood is stoked through the straw until the correct intensity of glow is achieved.

The next morning the pile remains covered with ash and carbon and is quickly unpacked by all members of the family – only three pots have cracked out of a total of 200. I had been given a raw pot from a potter in Nizamabad which has been travelling with me for four weeks. I had put it into the firing and it has survived, its highly polished surface turning a rich red ochre colour.



Delhi

Delhi is the capital of India, the third largest city and consisting of two parts. Old Delhi was the capital of Muslim India between the 17th and 19th centuries and contains many mosques, monuments and forts relating to its Muslim history. New Delhi, the imperial city created as the capital of India by the British, is a spacious open city containing many embassies and government buildings.

Traditionally there have been potters living in all the towns and cities of India, their clay vessels providing a necessary part of domestic life but diminishing markets are changing this. The plight of Delhi potters is described by SRUTI (Society for Rural, Urban and Tribal Initiative) in *India's Artisans – a Status Report*:

Delhi has a peculiar category of housing developments called resettlement colonies, first established during the Emergency (1975–77). In an attempt to 'beautify' the city, the Delhi Administration evicted slum and pavement dwellers from their homes, and moved them to outlying areas of the city. Among those evicted from areas like Jhandewalan, Turkman Gate and Ajmeri Gate, were entire groups of potters.

The potters from Jhandewalan were allotted plots in distant Sultanpuri. Their homes were now situated in one area, and their kilns in another. They were cut off from their traditional customers and markets, as a result of which their production and marketing costs went up.

The situation of potters evicted from Ajmeri Gate was even worse. They were housed in multi-storied buildings, constructed by the Delhi Development Authority. Cooped up in one-roomed flats, devoid of open spaces, most of them were forced to abandon their profession and seek wage labour. The few 'lucky' ones who were awarded ground-floor flats, somehow managed to continue their traditional craft. Even among the high wage earners, there were some who yearned to return to pottery and self-employment, provided they were given the space and related infrastructure.

Some years ago I had seen a video made by an American Fulbright scholar Ron du Bois called *The 700 Potters of Bindapur* about a potters' colony on the outskirts of Delhi. The idea of such a large group of potters working and living



together had captured my imagination and I wanted to find such a group. After some investigations and several hours spent in a taxi, being directed into all sorts of blind alleys, we finally found the Prajapati Colony in Uttam Nagar.

Uttam Nagar is the most depressing potters' community I have visited during my research, representing a large group of displaced families from village communities who have migrated through necessity to the city in order to improve their standard of living. Although they can earn more money here they are also victims of big city market forces, and are exposed to levels of consumer goods they will never be able to enjoy.

The size of the colony is several acres and contains about 300 working potters – there used to be 500 but the others have diversified into different trades. Most of the potters here have migrated from the neighbouring states of Rajasthan

Opposite: Filling pots with water at the pump in Uttam Nagar, Delhi.



Above: The family of Fakirchand and Dhanwati, Uttam Nagar, Delhi.



Left: *Kulhars* (small cups) thrown on the wheel in their thousands for serving tea at stations and street corners or at social gatherings such as weddings. Low fired, they are bio-degradable and will be disposed of after single use. Their gradual replacement by plastic beakers throughout India is resulting in diminishing business for potters.

and Haryana, the rest are from the villages around Delhi. A network of unpaved roads and alleyways, each one containing five or six houses, leads off several central tarred roads. Unlike the villages where mud architecture (made from low-cost materials) gives some feeling of visual unity, the colony, like much of urban India, displays an air of disorder and squalor through its wide variety of styles and building materials for house and workshop construction.

The one- and two-storey houses are built from brick and cement, many left unfinished or in a state of construction and disrepair, patched up with plastic sheeting and corrugated iron. The expense of building materials leads to high levels of improvisation and many walls have been built from a mixture of fired pot sherds set in mud or cement. Children are playing on the ubiquitous mountains of dry clay which have recently been delivered by truck, and appear to be in danger of engulfing the houses and workshops. Because there are always several firings in operation somewhere in the colony, thick clouds of black smoke rise into the atmosphere, adding to the already high level of air pollution in Delhi, the third most polluted city in the world. Most houses have a porch which contains the wheel, plus an outside area for the kiln, raw clay and pot storage. Water pumps are placed at regular points, the open sewers attracting flies and posing potential danger for the spread of disease.

Everywhere are piles of fired pots – waterpots, small cups, dishes, money boxes and flowerpots as well as rows of raw pots in various stages of production. The damp cold weather and overcast skies during these last two weeks of January are adding to the air of depression, and holding up production through lack of crucial sunshine for drying. Some of the workshops have developed into small mass-producing units, with hired labour replacing the traditional family-run businesses. New markets are dictating different shapes and designs, but it is grim to see the commercial work being churned out for a new consumer middle-class and supplanting the classic traditional forms. It is assumed we are interested in the 'modern' products and we reluctantly allow ourselves to be taken to several workshops. As we leave the last workshop I notice a row of 30 large waterpots drying in a line along the road opposite. Their pure forms and generous, full round bodies are irresistible to a Western potter and I am drawn towards them.

The family responsible for these beautiful pots are living next to the *Shiva* temple on the edge of the colony. Fakirchand and Dhanwati are in their 40s and live with their three sons, a daughter, and Fakirchand's elderly brother. The eldest son is married and his wife and three young children also live in the family home. They have a daughter who is married and living with her in-laws, but at the time of our visit she is staying with her parents. Fakirchand and Dhanwati

are from Haryana and originally lived in another Delhi suburb, but when development began in Uttam Nagar they bought a plot of land and built their house here. They still have a family home in a village 40 km away, where they grow crops during the monsoon and which they visit regularly.

The family makes mostly traditional waterpots ranging from 20 to 50cm (8 to 20in.) high (some press moulded, the majority thrown and beaten), as well as disposable cups ordered for weddings. Work is made to order for traders who re-sell at markets and shops – it is important that the pots sell quickly as the family lack storage space in the house. As summer proceeds, the largest size of pot is in greater demand and at the peak of the season 40 large waterpots are completed a day. They will be bought by traders to contain the refreshing drink *Jaljeera*, made from water and cumin seeds, which will be sold at street corners. Because the pot is porous the *Jaljeera* will remain cool.

Day 1

At the time of our visit the family is trying to complete an order of 300 pots – 100 each of the three sizes – but the bad weather is delaying production and there is spare time to sit on the *charpoy*, drink tea and discuss their lives. While Fakirchand smokes his *chillum*, Dhanwati tells us that her children are the first generation of her family to be educated and she had hoped they would find work outside their traditional caste occupation. Because none was available the oldest sons Hariom and Gopal are working with their father. Gopal, who is 20 and unmarried, also regularly visits the design workshop across the road where he is learning to make the modern shapes. This is a way for him of learning new skills and moving forward. The government sponsors these design workshops and places orders for work to be sold through their State Emporia shops and sponsored exhibitions, awarding prizes for good designs. Periods of transition are always difficult, and the scheme of National Awards, although developed to support the crafts, at the same time can inflate the egos of those given the awards and cause discontent in the potter community.

Saraswati, the daughter-in-law, and the youngest daughter Sunita are preparing clay for Fakirchand who will start throwing in the afternoon. It is a mixture of black clay from the mountains and red clay from Haryana in the ratio of 4:1 and is delivered by truck. They mix the two dry clays together and pound the hard lumps into fine powder with wooden batons. Sunita begins sieving while Saraswati forms a wall on the ground with the sieved clay; now they shovel the rest of the unsieved clay inside the wall and begin to add water. Squatting down, they wedge it by hand into manageable lumps and wrap it in plastic. The family follows strict laws of purdah: Saraswati completely veils her face in front of her



Press moulds for water pots with linear decoration carved out by Sheela. The hole in the bottom will allow the neck and rim to be formed later. Sheela is free to remain unveiled in her parental home, but when she returns to her husband's family she will adopt the strict rules of *purdah* and cover her head and face in front of male in-laws.

Storage space is a continual problem for urban potters in India. The family are completing an order for three hundred water pots which have to be continually moved in and out of the sun and rain. Here the pots are at various stages of production; some thrown, some beaten, some slipped and some decorated.

father-in-law, and likewise Dhanwati covers up in front of her brother-in-law. Neither women is allowed to speak in front of their male in-laws. The veiling of women is practised more strongly in the north and west of India.

Gopal cleans a flat stone embedded into the workshop floor and begins wedging the clay with his feet, systematically stamping in lines up and down the clay until he is satisfied it is thoroughly mixed. Dhanwati begins to clean up the area around the wheel and once again re-wedges, dividing the clay into lumps which she places on the ground for her husband. He has been using an electric wheel for four years, increasing production and requiring less physical effort, but he mentions the disadvantages of the high price of electricity and regular power cuts. The throwing and beating processes, so common to potters all over India, have been described in detail in the section on Himachal Pradesh and are carried out in more or less the same way here.

In the colony a popular press-moulding technique is used to make waterpots with raised linear decoration and Sheela the married daughter is keen to demonstrate. The thick-walled moulds, which are in four sizes, have been thrown by Fakirchand in two halves, and after the patterns have been carved out with a sharp metal tool by Dhanwati and Sheela, they are fired. One section of the mould contains a round hole at the bottom which will allow the neck and rim



to be formed later. Sheela spreads some dry clay powder onto the compressed mud floor of the workshop and also into the two halves of the mould. Now she flattens the clay with the palm of her hand (employing the same action she uses for making *chapattis*), places the flat clay into the mould, sprinkles it with clay powder and compresses it into the shape of the mould with the stone anvil used by her brothers for beating the thrown pots. She picks out any little stones and impurities, cuts the edge with a knife and smoothes it over with water. Now she rolls a coil of clay in her hands and presses it around the hemisphere, using it to join the two parts of the clay together, before inverting the moulds and lifting off one section, revealing the raised patterns on the surface. Later the pots will be placed in a chuck on the wheel and a short neck and rim thrown onto them by her father. She proudly tells us that she could make 50 press-moulded pots like this a day when she was involved in the family's production.

Sheela is enjoying talking to us and demonstrating her skills, and although she has married into the potter caste her husband is a doctor and wants her to train as a nurse. She has a radiant smile coupled with immense natural charm and poise and tells us that marriage has released her from hours and hours of making pots, 'Now I have free time – I only have to cook and clean.'

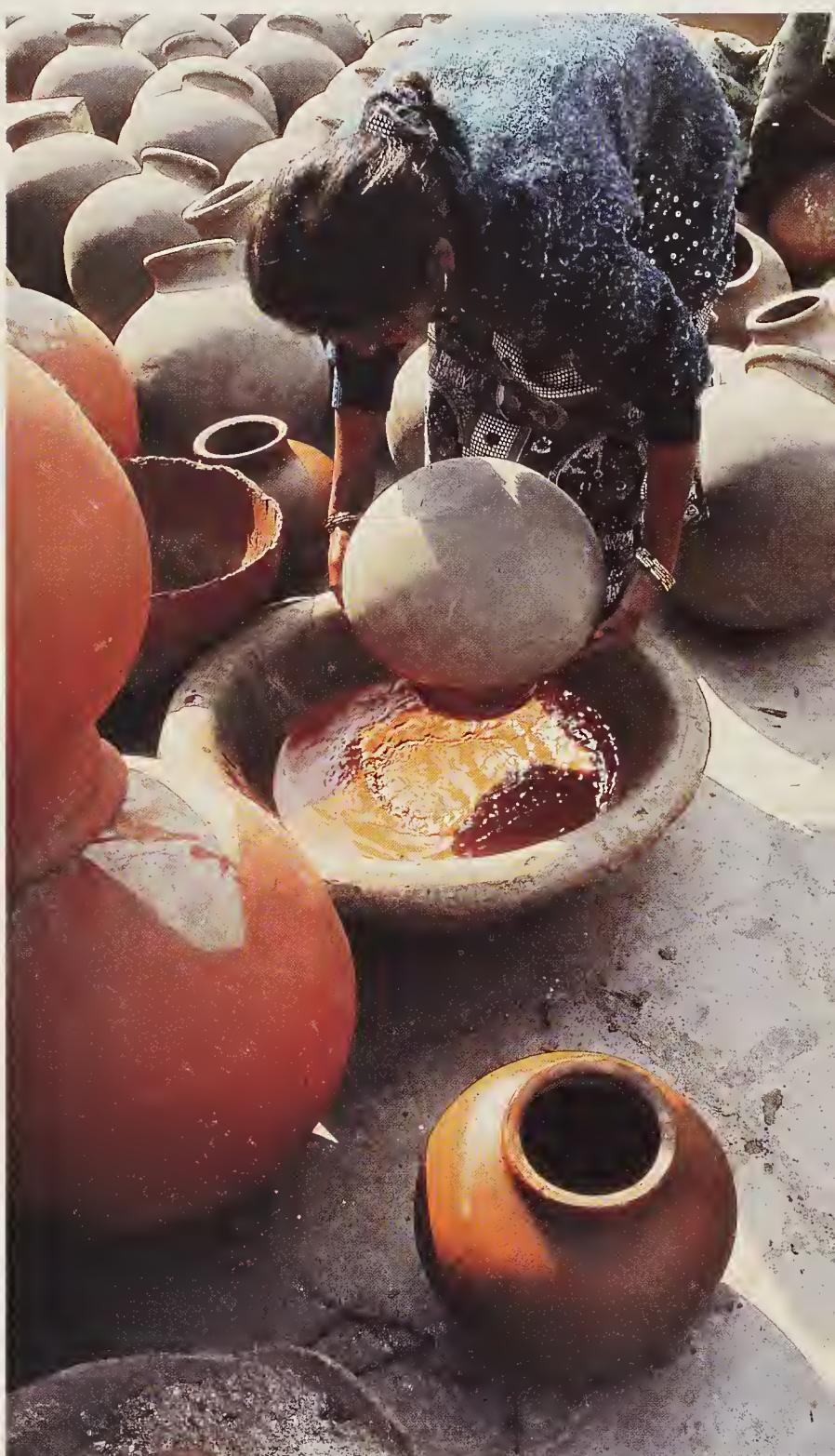
Day 2

While Hariom is continually busy with beating and drying the largest size of waterpot, Gopal starts preparing the red clay slip which is a kind of terra sigillata. Yesterday he added some soda to the same red clay used for their pot making and soaked it overnight in water. Now he pounds the clay continually, a tiring process, he says, in which he has to beat the clay 1,200 times with the wooden baton until smooth. He then adds more water, mixes it and leaves it for half an hour. The top layer is withdrawn and diluted with further water, the whole process repeated again until he has a fine slip of a very thin consistency.

We are led onto the roof by Sheela; this is the storage area and there are several hundred fired waterpots of different sizes stacked upside down in piles. A weak sun has broken through the cloud today which means that the finished raw pots can be decorated – they have been stored inside the kiln, covered in plastic sheeting, and are being retrieved by Hariom and Gopal. During the time spent here we see the incredible logistics of continually moving the order of 300 pots around – into the sun, back inside to avoid the rain, into the sun again, back inside at night, stacked up to the ceilings and surrounding their beds, into the kiln and now onto the roof before being finally re-packed into the kiln and fired.

The large bowl of red slip is ready and Sheela, helped by Saraswati, begins the operation – the rim is immersed first,

then one side of the pot dipped and spun around quickly so that the whole surface is covered. The largest size has to be spun by Gopal as the women do not have the strength to spin the pots fast enough. The decoration is carried out with brushes made from recycled house painting brushes and the traditional white and black slips made from stone powder. Sheela has learnt the art of decorating from her mother and,



Sheela applying terra sigillata slip to raw pots. The rim is immersed first, then one side of the pot dipped and spun around quickly so that the whole surface is covered.



Sheela takes a clay lid, fits it into the mouth of the pot and by gripping she spins it on to an inverted pot sherd and decorates with white and black slip.

being the eldest, is the most skilled. As a bride entering a new family, Saraswati must learn and adopt the styles used in her new home and if she lacks the artistic flair of her mother and sisters-in-law she will be assigned to more undemanding tasks such as slipping and burnishing. While Saraswati continues to apply slip, Sheela takes a clay lid with a knob, fitting it into the mouth of the pot. By gripping onto the knob she spins the pot on an inverted pot sherd which rests on the ground and while keeping the pot upright can decorate with the other hand. The action is very fast and very skilled. She always divides the surface into three horizontal bands, filling in the spaces with a mixture of more horizontally based curving lines and crosshatching.

Later, a neighbour asks for a damaged pot. A baby has been born and the pot is needed for a protective ceremony. Holes are pierced into the shoulder of the pot and a fire of cowdung ignited inside and covered with a lid. The flame will

be kept alive for seven days to keep evil away from the baby, after which the pot will be thrown far away from the house.

Pottery is the barometer of good and evil in the Indian household. Cleansed and made pure by fire, vessels readily absorb negative energy (anger, sorrow, pain or fear). When they are broken outside the home – especially when immersed in water – that inauspiciousness is dispersed and the family absolved.

Stephen Huyler in his book, *Gifts of Earth*.

Day 3

During winter, firings take place every 15 days and a firing is scheduled for today. Each workshop in the colony has its own kiln – some attached to the outside wall and some built separately – and of varying sizes. Fakirchand's kiln is five years old – a cylinder 3.6m (12ft) diameter and 1.35m (4.5ft)

Packing the kiln. Pots have been stacked inverted in rings around the circumference to a depth of eight layers. Fakirchand is almost buried and has to climb out of his kiln, standing on his pots and demonstrating how strong they are.





Dhanwati covering the pile with sherds which form a 'lid' to conserve heat.

high, built from a single thickness of fired brick covered with cowdung mixture. It rests on a hollow platform raised 75cm (2.5ft) above ground level, the platform containing a stoking hole which leads into a hollow underneath the floor of the kiln. This floor is slightly dome-shaped, with gaps left in between the bricks to enable the heat to rise up.

Last night all the raw pots were put into the kiln in case of rain and taken out again this morning to dry in the sun. It is 2.30pm and Fakirchand begins loading, first placing the largest pots inverted in a ring around the circumference and gradually stacking more and more pots in rings until he is practically buried in pots. Now he has to climb out of the kiln like a rock climber, standing on his pots and demonstrating how strong they are! Dhanwati appears, her face totally enclosed in her veil again because her brother-in-law is present, and begins to cover the pile with sherds. It has taken 30 minutes to load the kiln. On the street below, five bags of sawdust arrive by cycle rickshaw – the sawdust they had ready became wet during the rain and they will mix it together with this dry fuel.

At 4pm pre-heating begins by burning sawdust in the firemouth. Fakirchand places sheets of corrugated iron around the top of the kiln to act as a windbreak. After 30 minutes, stoking begins in earnest. It would be an understatement to describe it as laborious. Gopal continually throws handfuls of sawdust into the stoking chamber where it ignites, often flying back into his face; it is hot and exhausting work and after ten minutes he is relieved by a cousin who has come to visit. By now thick black smoke is rising from the top of the kiln and the whole family is sitting around, taking it in turns to stoke.

After three and a half hours Gopal is satisfied with the colour of the sherds, which are beginning to glow a dull red and the firing is finished, the temperature reaching between 1,292 and 1,472°F (700 and 800°C). During the summer Fakirchand will fire every three days. The heat of Delhi summers is legendary and with the increased number of firings throughout the Prajapati colony, conditions here must be unbearable.



The fuel for firing in Uttam Nagar is sawdust bought from a local mill and involves the labour intensive technique of continually throwing handfuls into the stoking chamber. Family members relieve each other every ten minutes from this arduous task.



Transportation of pots:

Opposite: A bullock cart in the village of Duvaradimanai, Tamil Nadu has been rented and packed with three hundred pots representing six weeks' work. The potter will travel around local villages, either selling the pots or exchanging them for rice.

Opposite, below: A potter from Orissa carrying his pots to the weekly market.

Below, centre: Black fired pots in Madhya Pradesh at a potters' home waiting for collection by truck. They will be delivered to a city and re-sold by traders.

Right: A woman from Duvaradimanai will carry these pots to a local market to sell.

Below, right: Duvaradimanai – a potter cycles from village to village selling or bartering his cooking pots.





Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh, India's most densely populated state, lies in the north-central part of the country, surrounded by Madhya Pradesh and Bihar to the south, Rajasthan, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh to the west, and bordered by Tibet and Nepal to the north. Most of the state is dominated by the Ganges plain, a vast flat area which often suffers dramatic floods in the monsoon; by contrast, its northern area contains some of India's highest Himalayan mountains. The Ganges river, which more or less bisects Uttar Pradesh, is the holy river of Hinduism and home to many important religious sites including the famous pilgrimage centre of Varanasi.

India is a country of great contrasts which can feed dramatic mood swings, and we have just spent a few depressing and frustrating days marooned in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, with its enormous poverty, crowds, pollution and heat (a fitting description for most large cities in India). A prearranged interpreter and guide failed to materialise and accommodation at our destination of Nizamabad has been neither confirmed nor found so the ride there is dominated with uncertainty. As we travel further from Lucknow the landscape becomes lush and fertile with fields of yellow flowering mustard and sugar cane. We begin to meet camel-drawn carts replacing carts pulled by oxen, and see rows of giant-sized kingfishers sitting on the telegraph wires lining the road. The sense of gloom at the beginning of the journey has been exchanged for a growing pleasure at the continually changing landscape of plant, animal, bird and reptile life.

Nizamabad is a small town situated about 100km (62 miles) north of Varanasi on the river Tons, which feeds several lakes on the outskirts of the town. The approach is dominated by a mosque, a reminder that the area was once ruled by Muslims. We are soon in a maze of tiny streets which open out onto a square containing hundreds of pots drying in the sun – we have reached the potters' colony. Dipalee Banerjee, a young studio potter I met a few weeks earlier in Delhi is suddenly standing before us and an extremely vague and barely remembered arrangement to meet us here has



materialised. She leads us to the home of Rajendra Prajapati, and within minutes a *charpoy* emerges from the house, is covered with an embroidered quilt, and we are sitting drinking a strange tea mixed with sugar and salt from their blackfired cups. Surrounded by Rajendra's family we enjoy the usual hospitality and generosity reserved for visitors, the abundance of which is unknown in the West.

We learn that in the mid-17th century Muslim invaders attacked this town, which was originally called Hanuman-tgargh (Hindu), changing the name to Nizamabad. Early in the 19th century one of its feudal rulers invited potters from Gujarat to come and live here in exchange for land. Once the four lakes surrounding the town were linked together with underground pathways so that the Muslim ladies could bathe in private. The potters were asked to provide pots for pouring and holding water, and gradually

Opposite: Thrown and turned pots by Rajendra Prajapati. They are blackfired and traditionally inlaid with silver which has been replaced with a mixture of lead, zinc and mercury. These highly decorative pots are made for the urban market.



Above: Rajendra and Kalpa Devi Prajapati with their family, Nizamabad, Uttar Pradesh.

Left: Thrown and turned pot, blackfired with inlay by Rajendra Prajapati.



the shapes of the pots became influenced by Muslim forms. The highly decorative silver inlay incorporated into the pottery here has developed through the influence of *bidri* metalwork brought in by the Muslims from Hyderabad. There are about 45 families still living in the colony which is gradually diminishing; in the last 25 years, 60 families have already left to find work elsewhere. Production is on two levels – domestic pots, oil lamps, *chillum*s (pipes), incense holders and containers for massage oil are made for the local customers, and the decorative items which are blackfired are exported to urban centres.

Recognition has come to Ragendra Prajapati. He is a National Award winner for his innovative engraved designs, and his work is sold through the government emporia in the big cities and also exported abroad. He lives with his wife Kalpa Devi, their three sons, two daughters-in-law, two grandchildren and a daughter, in the remains of a 17th century house. The original carved wooden lintel and door still remain; the rest built of brick covered with a mud/cowdung mixture. Hanging outside the front door and tied together is a bunch of dried cowdung, onion, five chillies, cactus and vinegar. I am told this will ward off the

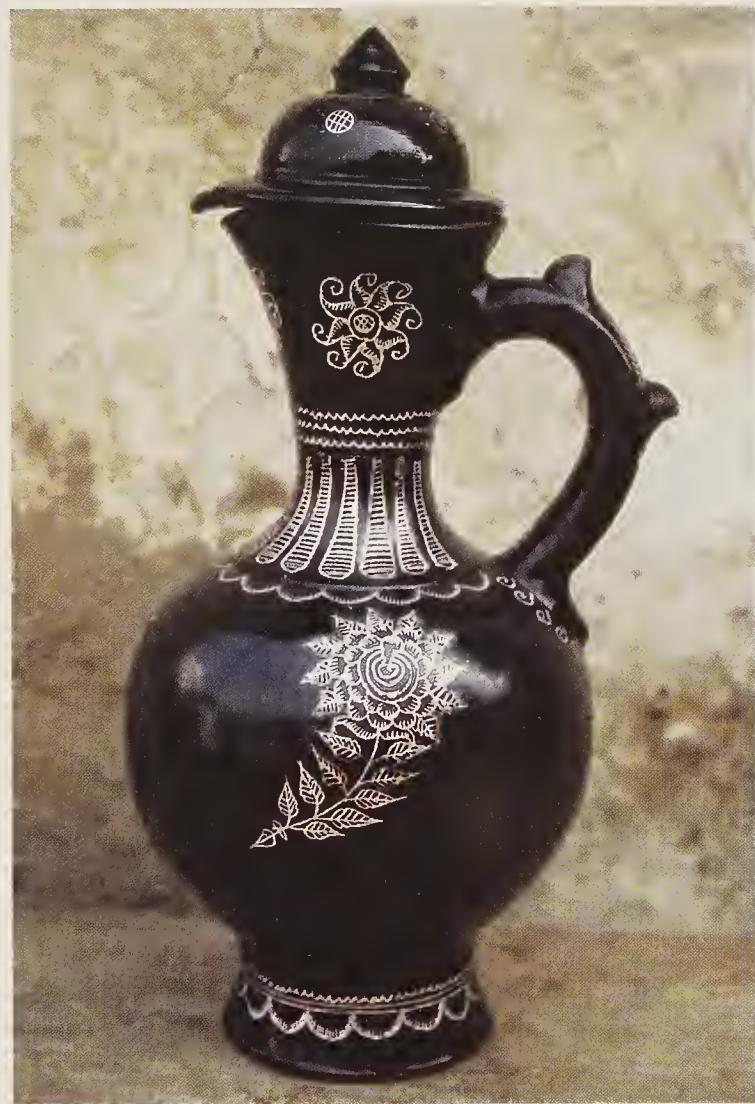
threat of an epidemic – a few days ago chickenpox broke out in the area and they want to protect the children from infection. Until recently the house had a clay tiled roof which has been replaced with corrugated iron. The first room of the original house leads into a modern concrete extension opening into a small courtyard, surrounded by rooms and containing a water pump and washing area. The pump was bought with the dowry money collected for their son's marriage. Most potters do not have any kind of toilet facility within the home, and personal ablutions are conducted in surrounding fields outside the village. During conversation with the young daughters-in-law in this family we discovered they have to get up at 4am in the morning in order to reach the fields under cover of darkness before the men start appearing.

Several areas in and around the house are used for working. The roof terrace is for pot storage, the throwing area and wheel are in the courtyard, and the clay preparation area is outside the front door. On the other side of the narrow street (not more than 2.4m/8ft wide) is another workshop containing a second wheel, the family shrine where they worship a dynasty of gods, and beyond this a small showroom. Examples of their work are displayed, and on the walls are framed certificates and photos of Rajendra and Kalpa Devi with various dignitaries. The family owns bits of land in different parts of the colony – one houses the kiln shed, another is for clay storage and on a larger piece wheat, corn, maize and mustard are grown.

The clay comes from two of the local lakes and is collected without charge in the summer when the lakes dry up, with the help of a hired cart and a mule. A lumpy coarse clay from one lake is mixed in equal parts with a fine sandy clay from the second lake. The family relates many stories about the clay, illustrating the high regard and respect they feel for it:

Once there were two potters' colonies here, one belonging to a Hindu feudal lord and one to a Muslim. The potters living in the Muslim colony had to collect their clay from a site on the land belonging to the Hindu who said after a while that if they wanted his clay they would have to also make pots for him. They had no choice but to leave their own colony but when the Muslim lord heard the news he dug another lake in order to keep his potters and supply them with clay.

Some potters who have migrated from the colony to Bombay arrange for this clay to be trucked this considerable distance, incurring huge expense but enabling them to continue their tradition with confidence. The government has recently announced that there will be restrictions on the extraction of clay from the lakes for ecological reasons and this is a great source of anxiety to the potters here as they cannot make the same pots from other sources of clay. In other parts of India where similar restrictions have been enforced on



Thrown and turned pot by Rajendra Prajapati, blackfired and inlaid. Nizamabad was once Muslim dominated and the shapes are influenced by Muslim forms, their decoration by Bidri metal work.

traditional clay sites, the government has offered alternative sources without understanding that a different chemical content in the raw material, however slight, will cause changes in the behaviour of the clay during making, decorating and firing.

The two clays are stored on a piece of land close to the house and every morning Kalpa Devi collects it in a basket and carries it on her head to the clay preparation area outside the front door. It is prepared in a similar fashion to that described elsewhere; the dry lumps beaten to a fine powder, water added and the clay wedged by foot by one of the sons and then by hand whilst removing any stones and coarse material. Nothing else is added to the mixture.

Throughout India there are several different designs for throwing wheels. Here a solid disc called a block wheel is used, made of fired clay with a socket carved underneath to rest upon a detatched pivot fixed to the floor on a stone. Apart from during certain rituals, it is taboo for women to



Top: A young boy in Nizamabad, Uttar Pradesh, throwing small containers on the hump on a block wheel. Children of potters learn from a young age to mimic their parents and boys from around the age of 8 years are introduced to the wheel.

Above: Ramjatan throwing on a socketed block wheel made from unbaked clay. The socket is embedded in the centre underneath and the wheel revolves on a pivot fixed separately in the ground.

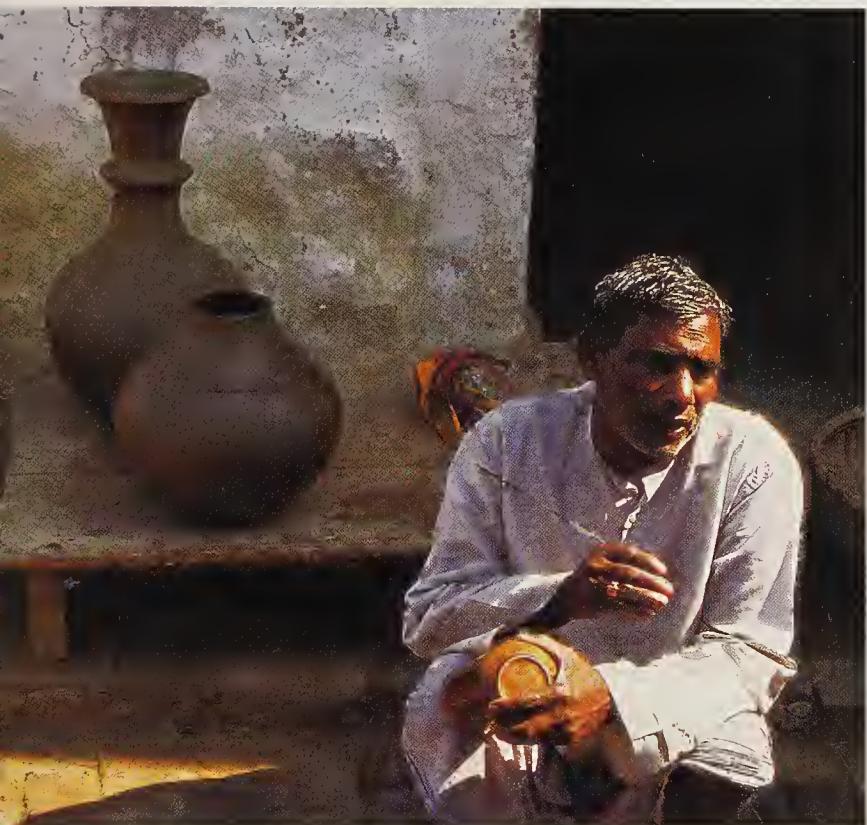
throw on the wheel or even touch it. Jyotindra Jain collected this explanation from a Rajasthani, including it in his *Mud, Mirror and Thread*.

We are known as *Prajapatis* and we are the descendants of Lord *Prajapati*. At the time of Creation, *Brahma* created *Prajapatis*, or the potters, and assigned them the task of making pots. *Vishnu* gave his disc to them to serve as the wheel, *Shiva* gave his lance to turn the wheel, and *Brahma* gave a string from his sacred thread by which a finished pot could be detatched from the wheel. *Prajapati* is the male, he operates the wheel and creates; the earth is female, the substance from which *Prajapati* creates. Turning the wheel is the male role, the earth is female. How can female assume a male role? The earth cannot be both the creator and the material for Creation. Without the male and female, Creation is not possible.

Rajendra devotes his time entirely to engraving now and has passed on the throwing responsibilities to his oldest son Ramjatan. Ramjatan is not skilled at throwing large pieces and a local potter is hired for this, working on the second wheel in the outside workshop. When not in use the wheel is neatly propped against the wall out of the way. Kalpa Devi applies mustard seed oil to the pivot and socket (this oil is kept separate from the main domestic supply as it is believed that anyone applying it to his scalp would cause his head to spin like a wheel) and the wheel is placed in position. Ramjatan touches his head to god as a sign of respect (all potters worship their wheels), places some clay into the centre and starts the wheel spinning with his hands. In order to engage the stick into the notch he has to turn his head in time with the wheel, and I wonder if he has been using the mustard seed oil to slick back his hair.

He makes a range of items: several sizes of lidded containers, beakers, jugs, vases, incense holders, and plates which are all turned so that they have a highly regular symmetrical appearance. Compared to most of the potters I have observed he is slow, but because this work will be sold for the 'luxury' market, he can demand higher prices. By contrast, many of the potters here throw the small disposable cups (*kulhars*) used where tea and coffee is sold at tea stalls, bus stands, railway stations etc. Up to 1,300 a day can be thrown and sold for five rupees (about eight pence) per 100. Once *kulhars* were commonly used everywhere but are being replaced by disposable plastic and polystyrene which are not, of course, biodegradable. It is the policy of Uttar Pradesh to use these *kulhars* throughout its railway network and during a two-day train journey I was able to collect about six, all slightly different in size, weight and shape; just as their six makers would be different in size, weight and shape.

The turning is carried out next day when the clay has stiffened and Ramjatan uses a selection of metal tools made



Rajendra devotes his time entirely to engraving now and has hired another potter from the community to throw these large forms.

by the local blacksmith, burnishing the surfaces with an agate pebble before he removes them from the wheel. Rajendra also has a diploma in engineering and the influence of working with metal can be clearly seen through the range of shapes the family produces. By turning the forms the edges become crisp and precise, taking on some of the character of metal vessels. The wheel and engraving work is carried out solely by men here and the slip making, slip application, polishing and inlay work by women. The whole family will be involved in the firing and the younger sons help with clay preparation.

The slip is called *kabis* and is used like a terra sigillata. A mixture of wheatfield clay, mango tree bark, bamboo leaves plus leaves from a creeper called *ance* are mixed with soda collected from one of the local lakes. Kalpa Devi makes flat 'cakes' of this mixture (resembling the dung cakes used everywhere for fuel) which are dried and stored on the roof. To prepare the slip she first pounds the dry lumps into powder with a wooden pestle and mortar, then gradually adds water until it becomes liquid and sieves it through a piece of cloth, allowing the dense material to settle. The slip will consist of the liquid remaining at the top and is applied by dipping and pouring. Pots are kept in baskets lined with soft material and handled carefully during the next stages, when mustard oil is applied and the surfaces polished with soft cloth. In order to maintain an unblemished surface on

the high shine, contact with fingers has to be avoided, and Kalpa Devi and her daughter-in-law must also handle the pots with cloth.

Most days we spend here with the family, Rajendra is sitting on the wall outside his house absorbed in engraving designs on the polished pots, pausing from time to time to smoke his *chillum* which stands beside him. It is obvious that he enjoys the work enormously. His improvised tool was once an umbrella spoke which has been sharpened to a point. He draws freehand, sometimes using traditional geometric designs and sometimes the floral motifs which are his inventions but always with an intuitive sense of spacing and proportion. It has been two months since I worked in my studio and watching Rajendra at work gives me an irresistible desire to try the engraving myself. The needle moves across the surface like a dream, the engraved lines undisturbed by the fine clay – the combination of the optimum material fitting the optimum technique, perfected over generations.

While we are sitting with Rajendra, two men walk by carrying freshly felled lengths of bamboo; someone has recently died and a stretcher will be constructed to carry the body to the cremation site. Ritual pots are an important part of the death ceremony and most potters keep a supply in stock. A small narrow-mouthed pot is filled with holy water and the eldest son of the deceased circumvents the funeral pyre carrying the pot on his shoulder, then smashes it on the ground before lighting the pyre. Once the body has been burnt, a pot with a hole in its base is filled with milk and water and hung above the cremation site, the liquid slowly dripping out and purifying the ground. During the ten day period of mourning, it is believed in most Hindu families, that the spirit of the dead person is in transition. On the tenth day the eldest son breaks a pot to symbolically release the soul into its next life. Many households replenish all their earthenware vessels at a time of death in the family and in some areas several sets of cooking pots are used and replaced during the mourning period. At any time during the year severe personal problems can be attributed to the malevolent spirit of a dead relative which can be lured into a clay pot by a priest and trapped there by sacred mantras.

Clay in its unfired state is considered *kachcha*: uncooked, impure; once fired it becomes *pakka*: cooked, pure. *Kachcha* and *pakka* are amongst the most common words in Indian parlance and used as metaphors for many situations – much as 'black' and 'white' describe various conditions in English. Something that is *pakka* is superior, dependable; a great man is a *pakka sahib*; a fired brick house is a *pukka* bungalow etc. When *pakka* pottery has become contaminated it becomes *kachcha*. Many actions and situations can cause this change, but the most common is contamination through contact with bodily fluids, such as saliva. Unglazed teacups are thrown



away after a single use; water stored in clay vessels is either poured into another vessel for drinking or directly into the mouth without contact to the lips.

A disease in the household will pollute all clay vessels and make them *kachcha*; even the slightest contact with an ill person will contaminate a pot. Birth, the beginning of puberty, betrothal, marriage and death – at every transition period the household is susceptible to evil spirits that may be absorbed by its earthenware. As a preventative measure, all this pottery is recycled.

The absorptive nature of *kachcha* pottery is believed to draw into itself all the inauspiciousness associated with the event. When the earthenware is broken, this 'polluted' energy is dispersed.

Stephen Huyler 'Gifts of Earth'.

Tomorrow, the family plan to do a firing but Dipalee my interpreter has returned to Delhi and there is no-one to translate. It is important to work with someone who has knowledge of clay and potters and is respectful of their skills and lifestyle but there is no time to search for a candidate. Through the District Magistrate we are sent a retired major from the Indian army and I find myself in the absurd situation of hiring him for two days. Assuming a major will not want to squeeze each day into the crowded public jeep which takes us the five miles from Azamghar (where we are staying) to Nizamabad, I also hire an ambassador car with driver. The major arrives for work, a robust man in a maroon Nehru jacket, crisply pressed grey trousers, Rayban sunglasses and a briefcase, and I am immediately full of trepidation that the potters will assume he represents some kind of official, and conversation will be restricted. However, he chides us for wasting money on a hired car and during the day develops an excellent rapport with the family, contributing many useful insights. He talks of the problems these potters suffer of exploitation by middlemen who re-sell their work in the big cities at enormous profits; sometimes the mark-up can exceed 500%.

Rajendra has a thatched hut a few streets away which he uses to house his firing pits. He shares it with several other families and there is usually a firing of *kulhars* (small thrown cups) taking place. Several egg-shaped containers about 90cm (3ft) high are lined up against the wall; these are the firing chambers for his blackware. They were originally large pots (*mutka*) for containing water or grain, with enlarged openings and reinforced by three thick metal wires placed in rings around the diameters of the bottom, middle and top. Thinner wire is wound in between the rings to form a mesh, and the surface covered with a mixture of clay and cowdung which will have to be reinforced after each firing. The floor of



Containers for pickles and cooking pots (thrown and beaten) for sale outside a potter's house, Nizamabad, Uttar Pradesh.

the shed is packed with a thick layer of ash from previous firings and Ramjatan digs an 45cm (18in.) deep pit into the ash. Fuel is buffalo dung which is bought and formed into 'cakes', then aged for a year to generate maximum heat. The pit is lined with dung cakes and the firing chamber fitted inside. Some crumbled dried dung is sprinkled into the chamber before packing commences – Ramjatan, helped by his younger brother, begins to load incense burners and jars, crumpling more dung in and around the items. Next the plates go in and there is much discussion about the placing – their original position changes several times until Ramjatan is satisfied. Meanwhile Kalpa Devi arrives with another basket of lidded containers on her head; these will be loaded into the chamber. She ignites some of the crumbled dung with embers from the previous night's firing, to ignite the kiln today.

The lid is fitted onto the chamber and a mixture of ash, dung and water is smeared around the seam to seal it, then the whole projecting kiln is covered with dung cakes. Bricks are placed in a line around the circumference of the base, leaving a gap through which to stoke the ignited fuel. Sherds are propped up on the bricks and stacked about two thirds of the way up the height of the kiln. Kalpa Devi pushes the ignited dung underneath the chamber, covering this too with sherds, and then the whole kiln is covered with damp ash, compressed against the surface to hold the fuel in place and retain the heat. It is now 11.15am and the packing has taken an hour. We return at 1.30pm to find the kiln smoking

Opposite: Kalpa Devi applying terra sigillata slip made from a mixture of wheat field clay, mango tree bark, bamboo leaves, leaves from the *ance* creeper and soda collected from the local lake.

heavily and more damp ash is packed onto the surface. After two and a quarter hours Kalpa Devi removes some of the sherds and then the lid with tongs, throwing some dried goat dung into the kiln to enhance the blackening. The lid is quickly replaced and sealed with ash, then after five minutes this procedure is repeated. Finally the chamber is covered completely with ash again and left until the next morning.

We return the next day, the lid of the chamber is removed and the highly polished black pots carefully unpacked – it is very rare for any breakages or cracks to occur. The inlay work is carried out by Kalpa Devi and her daughters-in-law – once the metal was silver but is now a mixture of lead, zinc and mercury. The lead and zinc are bought in the market and beaten into thin strips resembling tinfoil. Equal portions are pounded into a powder, mixed with a few drops of mercury on the palm of the hand, and pressed into the engraved lines with the thumb. Kalpa Devi believes that by adding some water to the mixture any potential risks of poisoning will be eradicated.



Firing takes place in a thatched hut. A pit is dug out in the ash and lined with fuel of dried buffalo dung cakes.



The firing chamber is a clay 'egg' made from a large water pot (*mutka*) which is placed into the pit. The raw pots which have been polished with mustard oil are carefully packed inside with dried dung.



Above: Kalpa Devi and her son unloading the black pots from the firing. More 'egg' firing chambers can be seen in the background.



Left: After the firing Pushpa, Rajendra's daughter in law, presses a mixture of lead, zinc and mercury into the engraved lines.



Kutch

Kutch is the westernmost part of Gujarat bordered along its coast by the Arabian sea, and to the north by Pakistan. It resembles an island surrounded by two arid desert-like areas called the Great Rann and Little Rann. The salt in the soil makes these low-lying marshes almost completely barren, any vegetation growing on scattered islands which rise above the salt levels. During the monsoon it literally becomes an island, as it is flooded by the sea and fresh river water, whereas during the dry season much of it turns into a vast expanse of hard dry mud. The government-produced brochure describes the hardship suffered by Kutchis living in this semi-desert in language which, although an incongruous mixture of English/Indian, conveys the full force of the elements well:

In this scarcity ridden area water is scanty. Food is therefore scarce. Earthquake often hits area very badly. 'Stromy' winds, tempestuous sands, scattered salt on all sides, terribly effected main Rann with loneliness, small Rann filled with mud and mire and drought are round the year phenomenons. With all those difficulties people are not despaired, instead they face those calamities with buoyant faces. They have not yet cultivated the sense of absconderness.

Despite these geographic and climatic extremes, Kutch has a rich tradition of culture, particularly in the decorative arts of embroidery, printed and woven textiles, wall painting, jewellery, leatherwork and pottery.

LODAI

To the north of Bhuj (the major town) is a large area of land called the Banni, the soil of which is unsuitable for cultivation but produces good quality grass and is inhabited by cattle breeders. The small town of Lodai is about 30km (19 miles) north of Bhuj, its population a mixture of Muslims and Hindus, mainly occupied with agricultural, pastoral and labouring work. Narrow unpaved streets are lined with houses built of mud, stone or brick with terracotta roof tiles and enclosed courtyards containing goats, donkeys



and buffalo. Flat-roofed cement buildings are dotted amongst the traditional houses, and the towers of several Hindu temples and a mosque rise up above the roof line.

The potters here are Muslim and highly regarded for the quality of their work, especially in the rich and varied slip decoration executed by women. A wide range of vessels are produced to fulfil the requirements of a dozen different communities and tribes residing in the area, including *Rabari* (tribal nomadic sheep and camel herders), *Jats* (Muslim shepherds and farmers), *Ahir* (farmers) as well as blue collar workers and labourers working in more modern fields of transportation and construction. Particular vessels have associations with individual communities. Just as personal adornment in the form of clothes and jewellery can express group identity, so the form and decoration of a clay vessel can take on this function – and is strongly preserved here.

Opposite: Surahi (narrow necked water pots) and large dishes for communal eating within the Muslim communities. Made by Mohammad Hussein and decorated by Hurabai.



Mohammad Hussein and his wife Hurabai with their family, Lodai, Kutch.

Mohammad Hussein lives with his elderly parents, wife Hurabai, three sons and daughter in an enclosed compound with the families of his two brothers. The land was originally given to his grandfather 100 years ago by the chieftain of Lodai, in exchange for providing earthenware vessels for the towns' inhabitants, but now demand has decreased and Mohammad's two brothers are working abroad in Dubai. Of the original eleven families manufacturing pottery only five remain; one family lives across the street, the others on the opposite side of town and the rest have moved into other trades. The compound is about a third of an acre in size and, with a total of 18 family members residing within its walls, as well as a donkey, buffalo and goats, is continually busy with human activity. The original family quarters of Mohammad's parents have been extended and there are now three separate houses plus a single roomed building which contains Mohammad's kitchen, pot storage and workshop. The kiln site is at the far corner of the compound next to an enclosed communal bathing and toilet area and the whole enclosure is dotted with bushes and trees.

Day 1

We arrive in mid-December, initially visiting the house of Mohammad's cousin whose work I had seen at Delhi Crafts' Museum the year before. We are quickly surrounded by

children and one of them invites us to see the work of his family, leading us into the compound. Mohammad is sitting on a hessian sack on the ground outside his workshop beating pots, one leg stretched out straight before him, the other bent so that the pot can rest in the depression between the curves of his thigh and calf. Around him are lines of finished pots, supported by sherds, drying in the sun. He is beating open dishes called *tavdi* which are used to make a kind of bread, *rotlo*. They were thrown on the hump yesterday and removed with a hole in the bottom. He opens out the hole by breaking pieces away and then beats it closed with a wooden beater and stone anvil. (This process has been described in depth in the section on Himachal Pradesh.) His sons are acting as vigilant 'minders' for the pots, placing yesterday's thrown pots beside him, moving them into the sun after the beating, then turning them frequently against the sun to dry evenly. Hurabai, his wife, is sitting a few yards away decorating cooking vessels which her mother-in-law has just covered with *gheru* (red slip). Their daughter and Mohammad's sister are beating the hard lumps of clay into fine powder which will later be made into plastic clay.

The making cycle, involving the whole family, is a repetitive rhythm of clay preparation, throwing, beating, slipping, decorating and firing, broken only by the monsoon months of July to September. During this time they rent land, cultivating it with sesame seed and mung beans. Their

high season is in the summer when there is an increased demand for waterpots and traders come regularly to buy in bulk; during the winter months they come less often and Mohammad is able to build up his stock. Right now he has an order for 500 pots which he is expecting to complete in the next few weeks.

After beating his daily quota of 15 pots Mohammad takes a break, slowly raising himself up off the ground, his body stiff from being in one position for several hours. He shows us the wide range of vessels he produces which are stacked up, inverted against the workshop wall, and explains their functions. Dry storage vessels for grain and flour – *tas, uthrod* – have wide mouths (allowing a scoop or hand to be inserted easily) and are made in different sizes so they can be stacked up one on top of the other as many as seven at a time. Vessels for liquids include those for carrying water, storing water, making and storing buttermilk. Water vessels – *hando* – are usually in pairs, the larger remains stationary and is filled from the smaller one, which is taken to the water source. The stationary vessel is either kept on a special platform in the home which has a small depression in it for stability, or on the rim of an old pot which has been sunk into the mud floor. Very large vessels for water storage – *kothi* – have very thick walls and a thick, flat base for maximum stability and durability.

Water which is required out in the fields or to be carried great distances is transported in vessels – *ghaddo, bhaddak, bhambhudi* which are produced with small mouths to reduce spillage. Each design has a groove in the neck around which a rope is tied to secure the vessels during transport, whether on the person's back or on a camel or bullock cart. Buttermilk vessels also come in various sizes with different widths at the mouth; larger ones are used for making buttermilk which is stored in the smaller ones with narrower mouths to facilitate pouring. Vessels for milk have relatively high necks with narrow openings, reflecting their function of carrying milk into the fields. He shows us a special pot for milking camels – *uthadi doyu* – with a very high neck to catch the milk while the pot is balanced on the uplifted knee of the man standing up to perform the milking.

Cooking is done in this area on a mud hearth or *chulla*, and it is a popular belief that food cooked in earthenware vessels has a superior flavour, which helps to sustain the demand for Mohammad's products. There are many types of cooking vessels. Those which are exposed to heat have enlarged thick rims (so the vessel can be handled when hot), wide mouths and gentle contours. Foodstuffs such as rice and milk are boiled in a *kunnu*, which has a sufficiently wide mouth to allow stirring. Other ingredients which need to be stirred frequently while cooking, such as vegetables and meat, are placed in wide mouthed vessels with almost flat bases – *taplo*.



Mohammad throwing open dishes *tavdi* on the hump using a spoked wheel made of wood and cement. He turns it in a squatting position, engaging a stick in a notch embedded in the wheel.

The *tavdi*, used to make *rotlo* (a type of bread) comes in two sizes. The *kachchi tavdi*, used for making the large *rotlo* eaten by pastoral communities, is bigger, thicker and has a handle so it can be manipulated more easily when hot. The smaller *tavdi*, used in urban contexts, has only a thicker outer rim for easier handling. Many of the cooking vessels – *sakio* and *tavdo* – have a sharp angle between the rim and neck, providing a grip for easy handling. Vessels which are used for food preparation – *kathrot* – are open and shallow with a flat base, and those used as eating utensils – *tabak, nani patar, sanak* – are also open and shallow with a rim base to add stability whilst eating. Amongst the Muslim community (unlike Hindu custom) it is traditional for all members to eat from a communal plate, and there are a variety of sizes to accommodate requirements. Ritual pots for marriage, death and birth are modifications of these pots in daily use but with different decorations.

Many of the vessels Mohammad shows us have the same function but different forms and decoration, to satisfy the demands imposed by the lifestyle of the different communities. Group loyalty to a particular vessel form or design is so strong that the nomadic *Rabari* prefer to carry pots considerable distances from Kutch during migration to avoid buying pots from other regions en route, since they dislike undecorated ware. Kutchis who live in Bombay will not buy local plain pots for their ceremonies, in fact Kutchi potters have migrated there in order to supply their needs.

Clay has been collected free of charge from the large lake on the outskirts of Lodai for many generations – as long as potters have worked here. Mohammad goes every three days with his donkey, and two sons to help him dig and load the clay. It is light in colour and requires no additions. He reminds his daughter Hajra Bai to finish the preparation for the afternoon's throwing session. She sieves the dry material through a metal sieve, forming a ring on the ground and mixes the remaining lumps with water in a steel bowl. Now she pours this mixture through the sieve into the middle of the ring, gradually incorporating the dry clay into the moist. She puts the lumps of plastic clay to one side and covers them with sacking to be wedged by both her father and grandmother later.

Day 2

We are staying in Bhuj and commuting daily to Lodai – an hour's drive through flat landscape covered with the fast growing thorny bush *ghela baver*, planted by the government. The more fertile pockets of land are cultivated with castor oil, cotton and sesame seed. In my experience, all journeys in India are a feast for the eyes (often the ears and nose too) and this one is no exception, its daily repetition enhancing the sights. During the winter Kutch is a breeding ground for flamingos and each day we look out for the shimmering line of luminescent pink outlined against the arid landscape where they are gathered in huge colonies beside a lake. Sometimes they are standing in smaller groups near the road and we can view their full splendour. Today we meet four large herds of water buffalo, oxen, sheep and camels on the road, accompanied by their *Rabari* – shepherds who dress completely in white with distinctive pleated jackets and turbans, their ears embellished with rows of gold button earrings.

Today is the death anniversary of Mohammad's grandfather and when we arrive the compound is empty; everyone has disappeared for a feast in a relative's house. Hurabai has stayed behind as she is still recovering from an operation she had a month ago on her stomach. She shows us her scar, a 15cm (6in.) vertical slash with inch wide stitch marks either side. There are government hospitals in

India but the standard of treatment and care is low and throughout potters' communities they would rather pay privately, an added drain on economic resources and often a contributing factor to debts. Although Hurabai was admitted to a government hospital her surgeon was private, making an honorary contribution to his patients and she and Mohammad are making some special *surahi* – narrow-necked water bottles – as a gift to thank him.

Later Mohammad returns from the feast, changes into his workclothes and sits down beside the wheel; he always throws in the afternoons so that the pots will have stiffened sufficiently for beating the next morning. He starts wedging the clay his daughter prepared earlier, gauging out a large slice from the mound with his hands, picking out small stones and slapping it back onto the mound, repeating this many times until all the coarse material is removed. He moves a flat stone onto the ground and his elderly mother squats down and re-wedges the clay on the stone where for many years she must have done it for her husband. She is tiny and frail now, a contrast to Mohammad, her eldest son who is a big powerful man at the peak of his working life. Once his two brothers also worked in the compound as potters but for the last six years they have been working in the Gulf as construction labourers, returning home once a year for a few weeks. One of the wives says, 'for the stomach one has to do many things – here there was no income – we are not able to afford a living with pottery.'

The spoked wheel is about 15 years old and made from wood and cement. It is set up outside beside the north facing wall of his workshop, in the shade. Mohammad turns it while squatting, engaging the pole into a notch. The momentum of the wheel depends upon the strength and practice of the thrower as well as its weight – a spoked wheel like this weighs between 37 and 50kg (81 to 110lbs) whereas the solid block wheel such as the one used in Nizamabad weighs between 55 and 95kg (121 to 209lbs) Once fully accelerated, the wheel can maintain its momentum for 8 – 10 minutes; if the momentum slows down before the completion of the pot, the thrower uses his pole again. Today Mohammad is throwing large waterpots. He works with quiet and stoical concentration, undisturbed by the antics of his many young nephews and nieces.

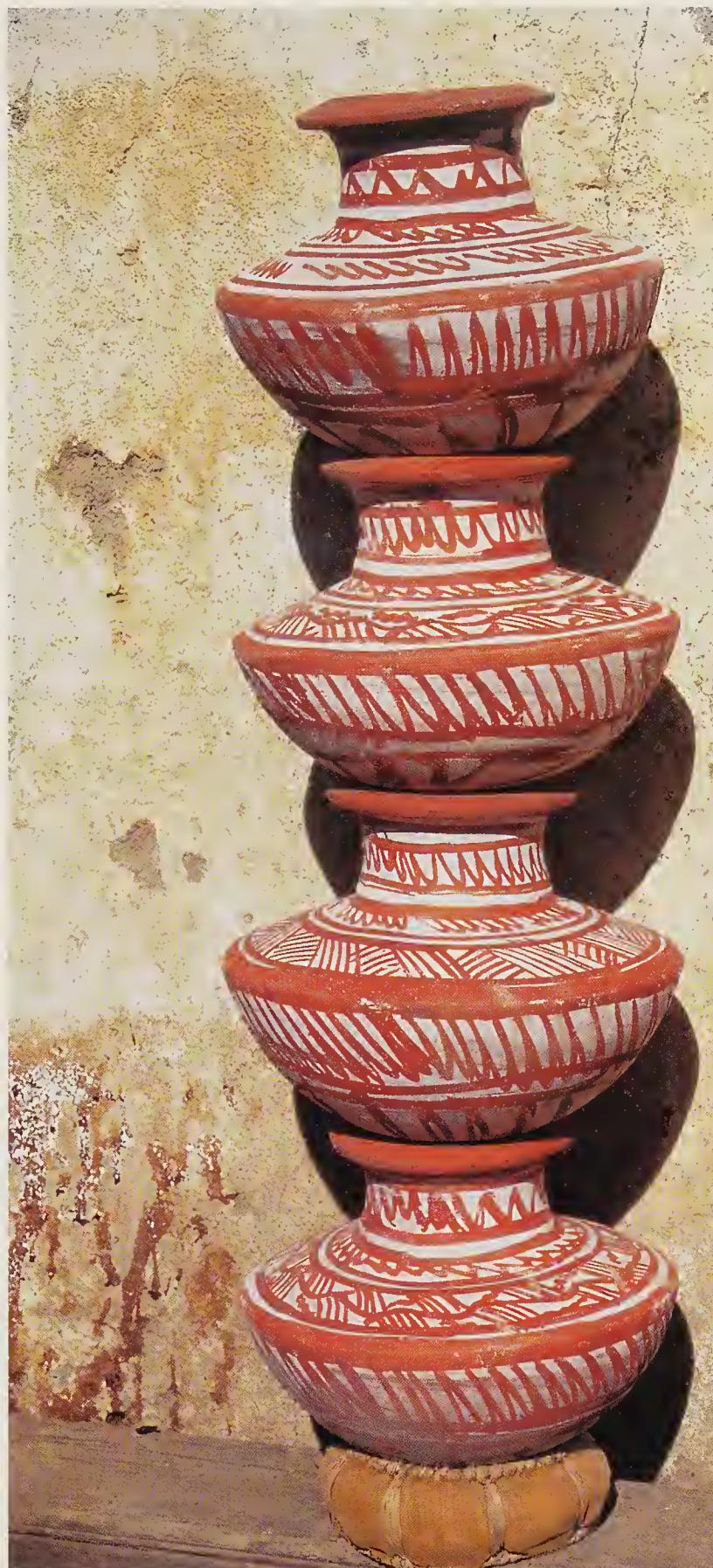
Literacy levels amongst the children of potters are not high. The school day is short, with attendance not a priority; without fathers present to discipline and involve them with the family business these children are bored and listless with no productive activity to satiate their energy. Most children in India have well-defined boundaries and limits of behaviour, taking part in the family trade from a young age. Sadly, it is not the case here, where traditional parenting has been broken down through the necessity of paternal absenteeism. It is likely that the sons will follow their fathers

to find work in the Gulf, in fact the eldest, 15 years old, is awaiting his passport in order to join his father. It is questionable whether even Mohammad's sons will be able to carry on the family tradition.

Day 3

Today Mohammad is beating the waterpots he threw yesterday, and as described elsewhere he completes the process in several rounds. After the final beating, he uses an interesting technique to give the form a fuller shape. The pot is supported in a sherd then a lid placed into the mouth to enclose the air. Taking the pot in both hands, he raises it a few inches into the air then stamps it down into the sherd, the trapped air giving the shape a more generous form. A neighbour comes into the compound to place an order for two pots for a Muslim wedding – one pot will go to the boys' family and one to the family of the girl – Hurabai will paint them white with red designs. There is no fixed price for this kind of work – a nominal 100 rupees will be given, or a length of cloth – but after the ceremony the vessels will be valued as part of the dowry and kept as decorative objects in the home.

After the final beating Mohammad uses a technique to give the form a fuller shape. A lid is placed over the mouth of the pot, enclosing the air inside. Taking the pot in both hands he will raise it a few inches into the air then stamp it down into the supporting sherd. The trapped air will give the shape a more generous form.



Pots made by Mohammad Hussein to be used in a wedding ceremony. It is traditional for pots to be placed at four corners of the enclosed square within which a Hindu bride and groom are married. Sometimes stacked five or seven deep, they contain offerings sacred to the ceremony such as valuable oils, rice, grains and money.

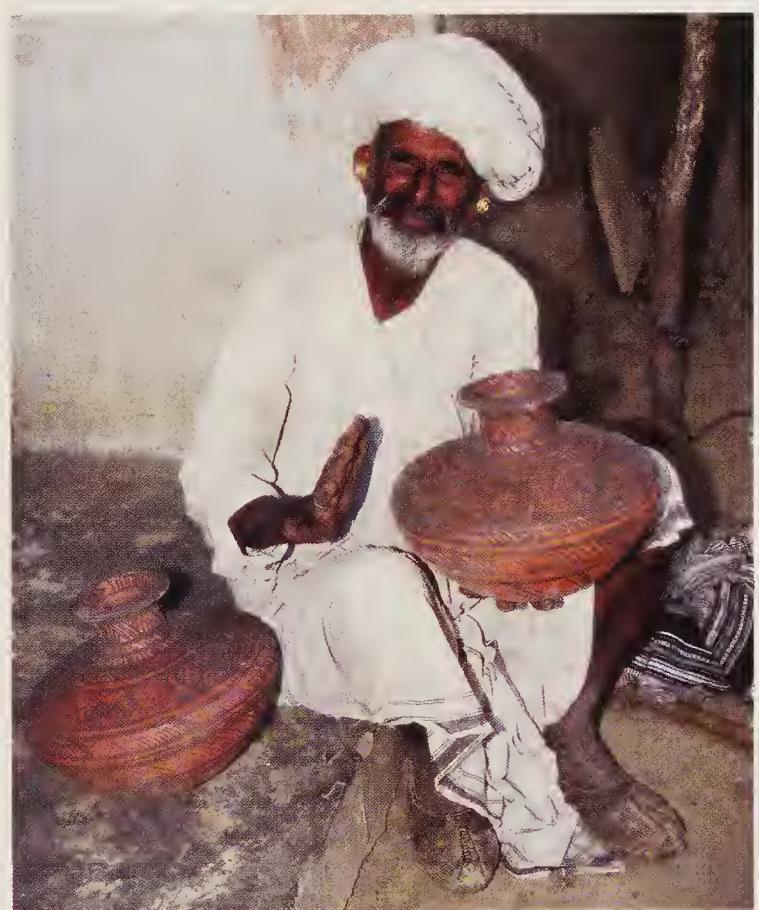


It is traditional for pots to be placed at the four corners of the enclosed square within which a Hindu bride and groom are married. Sometimes stacked five or seven deep they contain offerings sacred to the ceremony, such as valuable oils, rice, grains and money. In rural north India a ritual called *chak puja* is performed around the potter's wheel. The young bride visits the potter's home, accompanied by the other female members of her family, where she worships the wheel for fertility and success. The women draw sacred symbols on it with rice powder, tumeric and vermillion and give the wheel offerings of grain, sweetmeats and money (which is for the potter). The potter then turns the wheel anti-clockwise seven times, for good luck and to ensure a productive marriage, sometimes with the bride sitting on the wheel. After the *puja* the wife of the potter presents the bride with seven painted pots (symbolising the seven seas) for use in the wedding ceremony. This folksong, called the *Pahari*, and sung by the potter communities of Himachal Pradesh, describes the function of a waterpot during pre-nuptial bathing:

*An earthen vessel full of water
Courtyard, muddy water, what happened?
Bring the seat of sandalwood
the bride has to bathe.*

Ritual pots are always in demand and, spending time with potters in India, one is continually reminded of the constant cycles of birth/marriage/death which are interwoven with the day-to-day business of life. While we are here a *Rabari* comes to buy pots for a death ceremony – 12 vessels are required for 12 days of mourning but Mohammad only has five in stock, so he has agreed to make another seven which will be fired within the next few days. It is a custom here for both Hindus and Muslims to commission an elephant to celebrate the birth of a firstborn son, which will be kept in the house as a valued ornament. Most potters in Lodai have a few of these elephants in stock, made with thrown and assembled parts then painted and decorated by the women.

While Mohammad works he tells us about the different markets for his pots – the *Rabaris* and other shepherd and farming communities come directly to buy from him, as well as the local people living in Lodai and its surrounds. The *Jajmani* system of bonded agreement is still in operation here and some villagers barter with grain, millet and mung bean. Once a year he hires a truck and takes 400 or 500 pots to one of the Hindu fairs which mark the religious festivals, and several times a year he is visited by a trader who re-sells to distant villages and at markets.



Top: Elephants 20cm (8in.) high, thrown in sections and assembled by potters in Lodai. It is a custom in Kutch for both Hindus and Muslims to commission an elephant to celebrate the birth of a first born son which will be kept in the house as a valued ornament.

Above: A man from the *Rabari* tribe (nomadic camel and sheep herders) buying a water pot in Lodai. Group loyalty to a particular vessel form or design is so strong that the *Rabari* prefer to carry pots considerable distances from Kutch during migration to avoid buying pots from regions en route since they dislike undecorated ware.

Opposite: Hurabai decorating vessels commissioned for a wedding. They are painted with white slip and treated with denser, more intricate patterns than she uses for everyday pots.

Mohammad and Hurabai have been several times to major cities to take part in workshops organised by The All India Handicraft Board where potters and other craftspeople are invited from different states to demonstrate and sell their work. The various government organised schemes for craftspeople to travel and demonstrate their techniques are highly sought after as they are relatively well paid and give a rare opportunity for travel and contact with other craftworkers from all over India.

Day 4

We arrive early and the compound is still in shadow; everyone is wrapped in woollen shawls, complaining of the cold – nights in December can drop to 2°C (36°F). It is difficult to imagine temperatures of up to 45°C (113°F) in the height of the summer, the intense heat compounded further with sandstorms whipped up by the wind. Today, once the sun has warmed the compound, we will watch the slipping and decorating in preparation for the firing tomorrow. The pastoral communities of Kutch place high value on the art of decoration on houses, garments and vessels, and the patterns executed on their pottery reflect these rich traditions. Some of them are similar to designs used during the Harappan period. Each design combination is specific to a geographical area and also to a particular type of vessel. All over Kutch the painting on vessels indicates from which area the pot comes; a single glance allows a consumer, market trader or potter to identify its origin.

The pigments – black, red and white – are clays collected by the family once a year from three different sites and prepared by grinding and sieving, work carried out by the women. Mohammad's mother is applying the red slip – *gheru* – with a cloth and when it is almost dry she wipes off the top layer with a second dry cloth to even out the application and give a slight burnish to the surface. In accordance with Muslim custom here it is usual for a girl to marry her cousin within the family, so the mother in-law of Hurabai is also her aunt. Hajrabai, her daughter, began learning to paint vessels at the age of eight, although the learning of household work has been a priority so that she will make a good wife. It is usual for girls to marry between the age of 16 and 18. At 18, Hajrabai is ready but nothing has yet been arranged. After marriage she will move to her husband's house and, if she marries into a potter's family, will be expected to paint vessels and help in pottery production. It has taken two years for her to slowly graduate through decorating small toys and pots to mastering the skill of larger pieces and if she marries beyond Lodai she will cease to use the decorative style she has learnt here, adopting to that of her in-laws.

Today Hajrabai is taking care of chopping wood and cooking so that her mother and grandmother can decorate undisturbed. The brushes are made from bamboo sticks which have been sharpened at one end and beaten to form a frayed end like a brush. A piece of concave sherd is placed on a fired upturned pot which rests on the ground and Hurabai places the pot in the sherd so that she can spin it while she applies the designs. The shape of the vessel dictates the way in which she divides the surface, but each pot is divided by horizontal bands into clearly defined fields of neck, shoulder, body and base. On the red slipped pots she applies black decoration, and on the white slipped pots she uses either red or a combination of both red and black lines.

Now she begins to fill in the four blank areas with patterns and motifs, applying the lines with upward brushstrokes in a mixture of loops, cross-hatching, dots, vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines, as well as repeated symbols. She finishes by decorating the inside of the rim and applying slip to the outer rim with a cloth. Mohammad's mother has painted the special *surahis* (the gift for the surgeon) and the commissioned marriage pots with white slip. Hurabai applies a finer and more elaborate system of lines and motifs until the decoration begins to resemble the rich embroidery seen everywhere in Kutch on garments and cloth. Any ceremonial vessels and those which are on public display are treated with the most intricate designs.

Even with these more complicated patterns Hurabai never hesitates or makes mistakes, working instinctively with self-assurance as she chatters to us, and her sister-in-law sits behind her, combing and oiling her hair. Just as each community has its own style of dress and jewellery, it also has its own style of pots and decoration. *Rabaris* like a scorpion motif to appear on their vessels, *Jats* like elaborately painted pots resembling embroidery work with white dots, and the *Harijans* and Muslims like theirs with white and black designs on a red background. Whatever their preference, they unanimously regard an undecorated pot as naked and ugly. Here, as everywhere in India, the criteria for an accomplished painter is to execute the motifs and lines clearly and cleanly; there is no place for someone to initiate individual designs.

Day 5

Mohammad carries out eight firings a year and one is scheduled for today. He began working in October after the monsoon and the first firing in November failed to reach a satisfactory temperature due to a sudden strong wind, so he will include those pots in today's firing. The kiln site is at the far corner of the compound, raised up a couple of feet from the ground on a bed of ash. It is an elongated triangular shape, 6m (20ft) long by 3.6m (12ft) wide at the back with its apex at the front. It is 9am and after the usual tea and

greetings Mohammad starts to clear ash from the previous firing and, helped by his son and nephew, piles it up at the side. The donkey appears through the entrance of the compound, pulling a cart filled with brushwood, and driven by the eldest son and a cousin. This brushwood from the indigenous wild thorny bush is collected free, and during the next few hours the boys return with three more loads.

Meanwhile, at the firing site Mohammad has dug a 35cm (14in.) deep pit into the ash bed, piling the ash around the edge of the site, to form a 60cm (24in.) high wall which will help to enclose the pots. The women are continuing the business of slipping and decorating whilst the children continually move the finished pots around to face the sun, warming them evenly. Hurabai is mending cracked pots with a mixture of newspaper and powdered clay, ground together and kept in a dry condition. She wets the cracked area with her finger then smoothes the mixture into and over the crack. I see similar techniques used in other parts of India and it is ironic that during the last six years Western potters have announced the invention of paper clay and even attempted to patent the idea.

Yesterday the donkey brought four large bundles of straw of the *medival* plant, an ayurvedic laxative cultivated in the area and collected free. Mohammad assisted by his son, compresses a layer of sesame seed straw (collected from their own crop) a foot thick into the bottom of the pit and covers it with *medival* straw. The donkey plays an important role in pottery production here and is rewarded with the opportunity to indulge in a dust bath when Junus spreads ash around the area where he is tethered. He repeatedly rolls in it, kicking his legs in the air with great joy. The prime position for photographing the firing preparations is next to the donkey and during the day I am subjected to several more dustbaths, wondering if the camera lens will survive.

Now a thick layer of the thorny brushwood is added, and condensed by systematically stamping up and down on the pile. Junus begins to sort out the underfired pots from the last firing. By tapping and knocking them he can identify through the sound whether they need to be refired or not. Now Mohammad adds more brushwood, evening out the depth and compressing it with a wooden rake. By 11.30am the firing bed has been prepared and the children start to



The open kiln is an elongated triangular shape. Mohammad and his sons are spreading sesame seed straw on the bottom of the pit which will be followed by a layer of thorny brushwood. It will be beaten down and compressed to form a bed on which to pack the pots.



Above: Pots are stacked, inverted, in such a way to support each other and allow the heat to circulate evenly before being covered with sherds. The crucial decision of where to place a pot is always taken by male members of the family.

Left: The pile of three hundred pots is covered with sherds. This will be followed by a thick layer of straw and then a layer of ash to keep the straw in place and conserve heat. Buffalo dung has been packed into the apex of the triangular pile and will be ignited through the neck of a water pot sherd with straw.

carry pots to the site, placing them in groups according to their size and type. Mohammad's father returns from the mosque where he is called to prayer five times a day (Mohammad tells us he is not required to attend because he is working). He begins to load at the back, starting with fired pots, placing each one upside down on a sherd, assisted by his grandsons who are alternatively handing him sherds and pots.

Gradually, over the next few hours, the pit is filled until the pile is about 90cm (35in) high and contains around 300 pots, with the freshly decorated dishes stacked at the back. The crucial decision of placing pots is taken only by Mohammad and his father, with other members of the family contributing by covering the pile with sherds and piling up straw against its sides. Mohammad's sister-in-law rakes up the remaining straw from the compound. It seems there is not quite enough and some old hessian sacks are pushed against the back to compensate as extra fuel. He beats the straw down further and the women sweep up everything remotely combustible from the yard, throwing it onto the pile, by now extremely dense with compressed straw and brushwood.

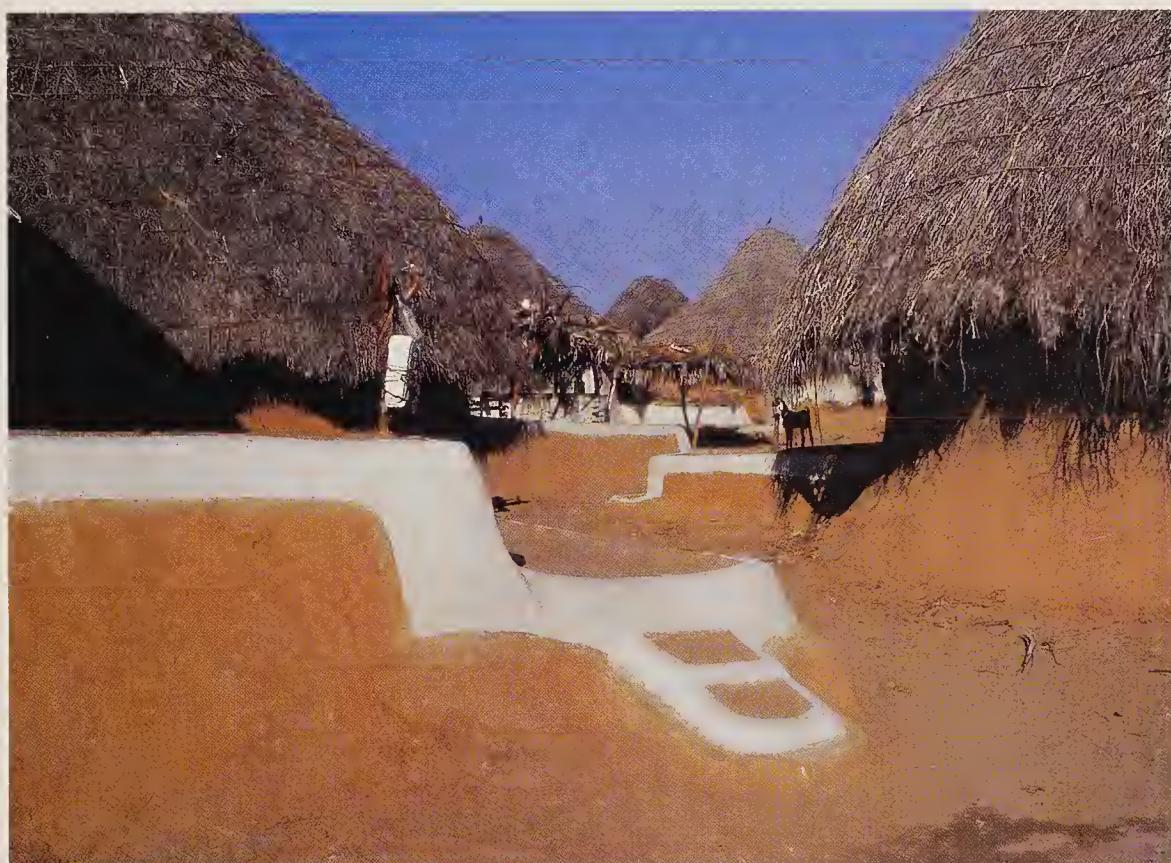
Junus and his cousin begin to dig a trench around the edge of the pile, shovelling ash over the sherds whilst Mohammad ignites the pile from the front. A space has been left at the apex of the triangular pile and packed with dried buffalo dung. In front of this is a waterpot sherd with its neck facing outwards; this will be the firemouth. Mohammad lights

some straw, pushes it into the mouth and covers it with a sherd, sprinkling water around to prevent it burning too fast. It is 4.30pm and the firing will be left all night to slowly burn through, lasting about 14 hours, and then left a further 24 hours before unpacking.

We return two days later and only three pieces have emerged damaged – a successful firing. While we sit with the family drinking a last cup of sweet tea the children suddenly scream with delight and run towards a man entering the compound. It is Mohammad's nephew (his older sister's son), a truck driver who has come to visit and spend the night before returning home. We wonder if he could be Hajrabai's suitor.

KHAVDA

Since I first set eyes on the relief wall decoration in the *bhunga* mud houses of Kutch, at the Delhi Crafts Museum, I wanted to investigate the source of this highly elaborate and beautiful art form made from the humble materials of mud and dung. Apart from a natural desire of human beings to embellish and decorate their environment, and the obvious pleasure it brings, decoration of village homes in India is also interwoven with religious significance. Hinduism teaches that all living matter is imbued with spirit, and that the many misfortunes of life are often caused by evil and malevolent spirits which can be avoided through the regular practice of rituals. Rituals to protect the family and



Bhunga houses made from mud in the *Rabari* village of Tunda Vand on the south coast of Kutch.



Above: The walls of a *bhunga* house decorated with patterns and symbols which are believed to prevent the entrance of evil, thereby ensuring health and well being for its inhabitants. The designs are based on embroidery of the region.

Right: As well as decoration covering the walls, doorways and lintels of *bhunga* houses, it is also applied to shelving, partitions, storage containers and cupboards. These are built from mud over an infrastructure of bamboo sticks.



home often incorporate wall and floor decoration, with patterns and symbols believed to prevent the entrance of evil (especially around windows and doors), thereby ensuring health and wellbeing for the house's inhabitants. Decoration also serves the function of acknowledging and thanking the family deities for protection and good fortune. The regular re-application of designs ensures continued vigilance from the god or goddess. Particular symbols and designs are believed to flatter and honour the god, whilst others protect against harm and the evil eye.

Most village housing in India is made from mud and dung, substances which are readily available and affordable but which require constant maintenance and repair. In order to maintain ritual cleanliness (mud is porous, and therefore able to absorb dirt and negative energy, and is therefore *kachcha*) the women resurface floors and walls regularly with a mixture of mud and dung. The uric acid in the dung contains cleansing properties. Women clean their homes in this way at each important seasonal juncture, such as the beginning of winter, planting and harvesting seasons and before summer (a similar idea to our spring cleaning). Cleaning in this way often coincides with the religious festivals. A new layer of sticky mud and dung mixture-

gobar-mitti is spread over the walls and floors with the hands, often leaving regular patterns from the hand/finger action. In Kutch this represents a blank canvas on which to build up the relief patterns with rolled coils of the *gobar mitti*. Further embellishment is in the form of small pieces of inlaid mirror resembling the embroidery work of the area.

As well as the decoration covering walls, doorways and lintels, shelving, partitions, storage containers and cupboards are built with the same mixture over an infrastructure of bamboo sticks. Women from the *Rabari* and *Meghwali* (*Harijan*) communities (not the potter caste) carry the hereditary skill to produce this work, which is closely related to the designs incorporated into their embroidery.

Day 1

Mohammad's father is travelling with us from Lodai to the small town of Khavda, home of his eldest daughter and son-in-law who work as potters and will introduce us to the women who carry out relief decoration. Khavda is a further two hours drive north from Lodai, literally at the end of the road and lies on the edge of the Great Rann desert, with the Pakistan border only 50km (31 miles) away.

Right to left: Khetanbai, her sister in law Koranbai (whose bangles, nosering and earrings have been removed because she is a widow), Tejabai and Lalbai, from Khavda, Kutch.



We are taken to the edge of the town where a community of *Harijans* are living. Beneath the four main castes is a fifth group who have no caste and are traditionally untouchable, performing the most menial and degrading jobs. At one time if a high caste *Brahmin* came into contact with an untouchable (or even had the untouchable's shadow cast across him), he was considered polluted and had to go through a rigorous series of rituals in order to be cleansed. Today the caste system has been weakened, especially in urban India, but it still has considerable power amongst less educated people and in the villages. Gandhi was a pioneer to bring untouchables into society, re-naming them *Harijan* ('Children of god') but now the term *Dalit* is preferred, meaning 'oppressed or downtrodden'.

The community of 22 adults and children represent an extended family originating from four brothers and their parents. They live in an enclosure about an acre in size surrounded by a thorny fence, on land belonging to a Muslim. In exchange for free rent they will work for him as farm labourers in the monsoon. Each of the six families live in a *bhunga* – a round hut made from mud and wood with a thatched conical roof. The thick walls and thatch are materials with excellent insulating properties well suited to the intense summer heat and the circular structure has a higher survival rate during earthquake. Each *bhunga* has a small separately built rectangular kitchen, and the bathing area consists of a stone slab set into the ground outside, screened by bushes. Some of the walls are painted with rich geometric patterns in earth colours of pink, yellow ochre and black, the lines and marks bearing a close resemblance to embroidery stitches.

A woman in India announces her ethnic membership by the colour choice of her dress, the design layout of her embroidery, jewellery details and her manner of comportment. We meet a tall majestic woman called Khetanbai and are quickly surrounded by a group of women and girls whose costumes and jewellery are so ornate they resemble exotic butterflies or birds. The sight of them reminds me that geographically we are almost directly on the line of the Tropic of Cancer. Brightly coloured and patterned skirts are worn underneath an elaborately embroidered short sleeved tunic inlaid with mirrors. A differently patterned and coloured cloth is draped over the head. Thick silver anklets and several necklaces adorn the feet and neck and each arm is covered with 32 white bangles – 16 above and 16 below the elbow. A large engraved silver button pierces the nose and the ears are bent almost double by the weight of heavy dangling silver earrings pierced around the edge in rows. The hair is parted in the middle and clipped flat to either side of the face with brightly coloured hair clips. This is the traditional costume of women from the *Marwar Meghwal* community, who originally came from Rajasthan. Within a community,

the details of a woman's clothing and jewellery define her specific position, as well as marital and childbearing status, and are immediately recognisable to other members.

The *Marwar Meghwal* caste occupation is that of cobblers/leather workers. They are known not only for their prize-winning leather work but also for their unusually bold patchwork, their embroidery, and finely detailed wall decoration. During periods of drought the government has a policy of building roads (in order to provide work for people who are unable to grow food) and recruits members of this community for road construction and labouring. Travelling by road in India, it is a common sight to see these women, dressed in their full costumes and jewellery digging and carrying earth.

Khetanbai is a woman in her mid-40s living with her husband, two daughters and son, and she invites us inside her *bhunga* to admire the decoration she has applied to the walls and cupboards. Directly opposite the door is a raised platform – *pedlo* – on which are resting two decorated rectangular storage containers – *sanjeer* – and beside them a low wooden table – *manji* – piled high with embroidered quilts. These quilts represent the family's wealth. The walls have numerous built-in alcoves and niches for storage which are crammed with such day to day objects as battery cells, lightbulbs and glass bottles displayed as decorative ornaments. Beside this is a low decorated mud table – *paniyan* – with depressions scooped out of the top to support the rounded bottoms of waterpots – *matkas* – and on which is stacked a pile of seven pots, one on top of another containing grains and dried beans. The walls and clay furniture are covered with whitewash and bands of pink and ochre edged with black lines resembling embroidered cross-stitch have been painted around the windows. Although the contents of the *bhunga* are limited to life's bare essentials, the intricate relief decoration and inlaid mirrors which catch and reflect the light convey a rich and lavish environment.

Due to the constraints of time, it is not possible to record the relief decoration process as it would naturally occur, but Khetanbai agrees to undertake a commission to decorate a wall and storage cupboard. The work is usually carried out by several women working together and it is arranged that she will work in the *bhunga* of her sister-in-law, Koranbai, who lives next door, assisted by her daughter-in-law Tejabai, and Khetanbai's daughter Lalbai. It is difficult to grasp the names and relationships of these women and it becomes increasingly so as we are joined by more sisters, sisters-in-law, cousins and aunties, all wearing the richly elaborate costumes.



The inside of Khetanbai's *bhunga* house, Khavda, Kutch. On the right is a low decorated mud table *paniyan* with depressions built into the top to support the stacks of round bottomed pots containing dried grains and beans. The pile of embroidered quilts represents the family's wealth.

Day 2

We arrive to find the four women preparing clay and donkey dung. Khetanbai is beating the locally collected dry clay while her daughter beats the dung into a fine powder. Koranbai is winnowing the powdered dung and once the dry materials are prepared, Khetanbai mixes two parts dung to one part clay with water, into a plastic consistency. We go into the *bhunga* and Khetanbai prepares the wall and cupboard by smoothing a liquid mixture of clay and dung over the surface with her hands. Koranbai had made the grain storage cupboard – *chausaar* – without decoration three years before and this will be a good opportunity to complete it. It was constructed from clay (no dung) with thick coils which are flattened with the palms of the hands to at least an inch thick. The two young women begin to edge the cupboard with a thick coil of clay which is transferred into a triangular pattern called *tikuna kangri*. Tejabai repeatedly presses her finger knuckles into the soft clay to mark out the initial distances between the triangles and then Lalbai refines them by smoothing with her fingers dipped in water.

Sometimes the women are commissioned by other members of their caste to carry out decoration in exchange for food, textiles or services. Members of the Muslim community also hire them but this is happening less frequently



Khetanbai making a small grain container from thick coils of clay which are flattened between the palms of the hands. Later the surface will be covered with relief coiled decoration.

as where affordable cement is replacing mud as a building material. Relief wall decoration appeals to the urban aesthetic and it is fashionable for public places such as hotels and restaurants to commission work.

Now Khetanbai is breaking the mirror (which is bought by the square foot) into small pieces and Tejabai pushes them into the border while the clay is still soft. She has been married a year and has a baby son; she frequently stops work to nurse him and smoke a *bidi* (hand-rolled cigarette). It quickly becomes apparent that she is the most skilled of the four women. She takes over decision making about the development of a sun design on the cupboard and instructs Lalbai where to place a circular piece of mirror which will become the centre of the motif. This is the first opportunity she has had to decorate with *gobar mitti* since she came to live with her in-laws and she is enjoying it. Koranbai is rolling coils on the mud floor inside the *bhunga*, thick ones for Khetanbai who has started a wall decoration under the shelf and thinner ones for the cupboard. There is a lot of discussion about the designs which are traditional motifs and geometric patterns handed down from mother to daughter, each one identified by a name: *kungri* – border, *butti* –

small flowers, *vel* – creeper, *handhia* – camels, *panihari* – woman with waterpot, *mor* peacock. They work slowly and meticulously, absorbed by the material and the spatial relationships of the patterns which are gradually emerging.

Khetanbai suddenly realises it is 12.30pm and the men will be back for their midday meal, which they have not yet prepared. Tragically the number of male members in this community has been reduced due to a T.B. epidemic which wiped out three of the original brothers, their father and two of their sons. Several of the women living here are widows, bringing up their children alone. The other sons who would normally be working at home producing leather goods are attending a workshop, organised by the Rural Technology Institute, on ways to improve their techniques and markets, although Tejabai's husband acidly comments that the instructors are learning from the students rather than the other way around.

During the afternoon Tejabai and Lalbai continue decorating the cupboard and the central sun motif becomes a flower as the rays of the sun are linked with curved coils. Khetanbai is incorporating diamond shapes into the wall decoration, pressing mirrors into the clay as the design



Small pieces of mirror are embedded into the clay while still soft by Lalbai and the central motif established. Painting on the wall resembles embroidery stitches used by the women.



Tejabai works slowly and meticulously, absorbed by the spatial relationships of the patterns which are gradually emerging. The traditional motifs and geometric patterns are handed down from mother to daughter, each one identified by a name.

progresses. We are spending three days with these women in the womb-like intimacy of their *bhunga*, and as well as the privilege of watching them work there is plenty of time for us to find out about their lives and vice versa. Helena Greene, an English painter, is accompanying me for a few weeks, spending the time drawing and painting the women at work and the environment of the enclosure. The drawings are inviting a lot of interest especially as she can capture their posture and expressions quickly and realistically in watercolour and pen and ink. An interesting exchange is developing: us watching them at work while they watch her.

Day 3

Tejabai is keen to show us her work *in situ* at the house of her parents who live in a village 5km (3 miles) away. We drive along dirt tracks through an arid landscape dotted with camels and arrive at Motapaiya. Her house is *pukka*, made from stone and cement but every inch of the interior walls is covered with intricate patterns and motifs, all executed by Tejabai and her mother. She is extremely proud of her work and is taking great pleasure in showing it off to us. Just as the decorations of pottery changes from village to village, so does the embroidery and wall decoration and the combination of designs and symbols is different to the work we have seen in the *bhungas* of her in-laws. It is not the custom for children from this community to attend school as the family need them to learn embroidery/leather making

skills from an early age in order to generate income. Unlike other castes where girls marry in their early teens, the girls here wait until they are 19 or 20. By then, if they are skilled like Tejabai, they will have developed a sophisticated sense of design, whether for embroidery or wall decoration. Education is not compulsory in India, but Tejabai tells us she intends to send her baby son to school when he is older.

We return to find Khetanbai already continuing the wall decoration and Koranbai preparing more of the clay/dung mixture. Tejabai and Lalbai are now building up intricate patterns with thinner coils inside the linear divisions at the four corners of the cupboard. Tejabai complains that the clay is the wrong consistency and does not contain enough donkey dung. While they work they describe to us how a *bhunga* is constructed with the help of all family members. Divisions of labour are divided between male and female members of the family in a similar way to pottery production. The *bhunga* is, in fact, a large clay vessel and is formed and decorated using similar techniques to that of pottery making.

The mud is delivered by camel cart from a source a few kilometres away and 20 carts full are needed to complete the building. Mud blocks are formed inside a wooden frame measuring 35 x 26 x 13.5cm (14 x 10.5 x 6in.) and dried in the sun for four days. A rope is attached to a central point to mark out the radius of a circle and foundations dug to contain the first course of blocks. The walls are built up from blocks with wet clay acting as mortar pushed in between, but will not be rigid enough to carry the roof. Two posts are



Khetanbai decorating a wall in her sister in law's *bhunga*. Later it will be painted with a white wash. Small pieces of mirror have been embedded into the coils.

embedded into the clay walls to support a beam and a wooden prop placed in the centre of the beam to support the conical roof. The load is transferred through the beam to the posts. A conical wooden frame is made of sticks which rise from the wall and are tied down with rope at the crown to create the cone. Lastly, the cone is surfaced externally with thatch and the walls covered with mud plaster.

Shelves and niches are built into the walls, initially formed with a bamboo structure and then covered with the clay/dung mixture. The knowledge and skill to build these houses is passed from one generation to another with materials which are inexpensive and easily replenishable, the styles and designs changing from one area to another. However, it is the desire of most mud house dwellers to become cement or brick house dwellers – in other words to live in a *pukka* house – constructed from manufactured materials of a permanent nature. While investigating other *bhunga* villages in the area we met an old lady who has

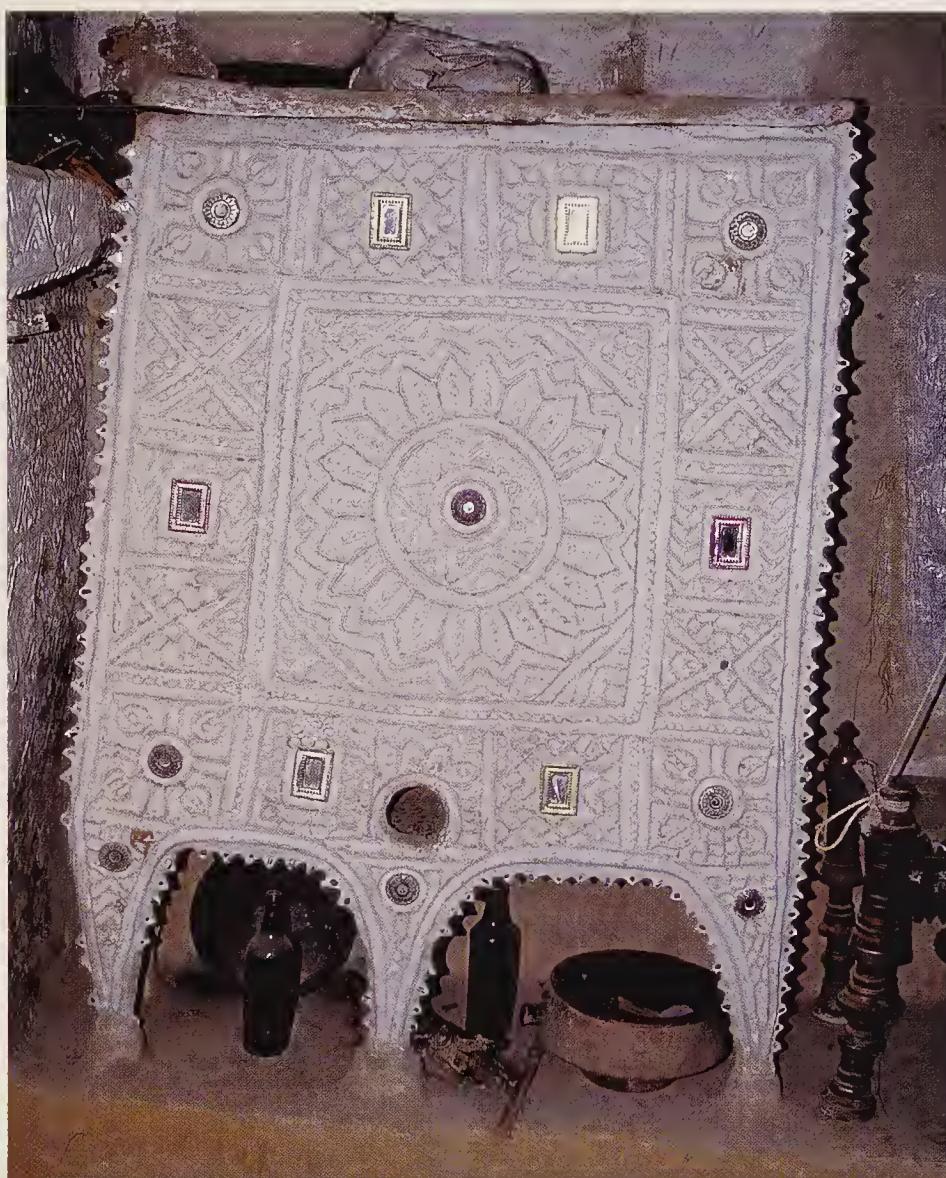
moved into a cement house with her son, and she complained that it has no insulating properties against the heat of the summer or the cold of the winter nights.

Day 4

The cupboard and wall are finished and have been painted with liquid white clay. There was some *gobar mitti* left over and Khetanbai has modelled some small animals – camels, an ox and a horse which are standing on the platform outside the *bhunga* when we arrive today. The sculpted forms are pinched with great manual dexterity within a few minutes, their forms simplified and stylised. They capture the character of the animals perfectly. In another culture her work could easily be highly sought after and valued. It is ironic that in Japan a potter can achieve the highest status of National Living Treasure but here in India craftworkers and artisans must suffer amongst the lowest ranks of society.



Khetanbai has modelled some small votive camels with the left over *gobar mitti*. Pinched within a few minutes, she captures the character of the animal with great flourish.



Later we travel to Tunda Vand, a *Rabari* village built entirely of *bhunga* houses on the south coast of Kutch. Arrangements are made for us to stay the night with a *Rabari* family and sleep inside the *bhunga*. Quilts are lain out on the floor for our bedding and the light from the oil lamp catches hundreds of mirrors inlaid into the walls and cupboards. As we lie on the floor in a row, every surface in this circular room glitters like hundreds of tiny lights and I am reminded that today is in fact Christmas Day.

A finished grain container.



Votive Terracotta

There are three levels of worship for a Hindu: at the temple, at the local shrine, and within the household arena at home. The temples in every town and city are built in grand architectural style from durable materials, and function as a place for devotees to worship the classic pantheon of gods through rituals performed by Brahmin priests. Clay vessels and oil lamps may be used as part of ritual worship in temples but the offering of terracotta is not a custom. In contrast, shrines are usually outside in the open, perhaps under a tree or on a simple platform made from mud and coated with lime wash. Each village has shrines to its own patron deity, each caste group has shrines to its own preferred gods and there are family shrines dedicated to ancestors. The Hindu religion allows individuals to worship gods and goddesses of their own choice, so throughout India there are literally many millions of different gods. These deities may be linked to formal religion but are usually associated with the earth, fertility, agriculture and healing as well as the forces of nature. Worship revolves around the offering of terracotta figures either to appease the god or to fulfil a vow in return for a favour. If a villager's buffalo becomes sick for example, the appropriate deity might be asked for a cure and promised a terracotta horse in return.

This level of devotion takes place throughout rural India and involves many forms of clay offerings: horses, elephants, tigers, bulls, camels, houses, cowherds, men with musical instruments, figures of mother and child, men and women. Different parts of the human body are made from clay and offered – eyes, ears, hands, navels, male genitals, (represented by balls), breasts, feet and ankles. Devotees from the

Chaudhari and Bhil tribes offer a clay leg to heal their leg, a clay hand if their own hand is hurt, an eye for their own injured eye. Sometimes they offer a whole human figure to make someone physically whole again and more general afflictions may be symbolised by a star-shaped disc to cure fainting or a round ball for cramps.

The third area for devotion is the shrine within the house where paintings and photos of the gods are hung, and any objects sacred to the family kept. It is also within the home environment that *Vratas* (personal vows between the devotee and god) are made, usually pledged by women and entailing fasting, prayer and the painting of sacred designs on mud walls and floors.

The work presented in this section illustrates some of the votive terracotta made and used for worship in local shrines. The impressive *Ayanaar* horse from Tamil Nadu represents the largest terracotta sculpture ever made and is constructed from coiling and beating, the same techniques used for making vessels. Although votive terracotta is made by members of the Hindu potter caste, the customer is often a member of the Tribal community. The relief plaques depicting images of Tribal deities are made in Rajasthan and the varied styles of horses and tigers recorded in Gujarat are also made for Tribal clientele. Madhya Pradesh is represented by the highly embellished elephants offered in forest shrines and also by women's wall decoration. This involves using clay pigments and decorating techniques similar to pottery sgraffito and modelling processes. In Bengal the snake goddess *Manasa* is worshipped through a terracotta tree shrine constructed from multiple thrown and modelled parts.

Opposite: Molela, Rajasthan. Navli mending cracks on votive plaques with soft clay prior to firing.



Tamil Nadu

The state of Tamil Nadu stretches from India's southern-most tip north to Andhra Pradesh, bordered by the Bay of Bengal to the east and the states of Kerala and Karnataka to the west. Its inhabitants, the Tamils, are one of the ancient Dravidian (aboriginal) races pushed south by Ayran invasions but who, because never conquered, retain their own language and customs. Several levels of worship exist within the village communities, family deities are worshipped in the home, caste deities are worshipped at small anonymous shrines, and village deities are worshipped at village temples.

Throughout the south the god *Ayanaar* is worshipped as a village guardian deity who protects not only individuals within the community but also their animals and crops. There are many village deities who in reality represent a collection of male and female heroes, warriors, demons and ghosts (local historical characters who once lived on earth) of varying degrees of importance and popularity. *Ayanaar* is one such important and popular god, both loved and feared by the villagers, who ask him to resolve their main day-to-day problems which revolve around disease, weather, conception and childcare.

Shrines to *Ayanaar* are built where he is believed to live, situated next to water on the outskirts of villages in order to protect their geographical boundaries, and to avoid a villager unknowingly provoking his anger. Life-sized terracotta horses have been placed at the shrines to provide transportation for *Ayanaar*'s spirit soldiers, enabling them to travel through the villages and fields at night to fight against evil. Houses within the villages are built a metre apart to allow the horses to pass through, and many villagers are fearful of crossing his path at night lest they be beaten to death by his soldiers. The styles of horses vary from area to area: some are more realistic or more abstract but they are all complete with harness and reins and have the appearance of being 'ready to go' at a moment's notice. Because the



potter's primary function is to make vessels for the village, the sculptured forms are dictated by the techniques of pot making and are formed by coiling, beating and modelling.

Although the horse is revered as the most popular vehicle for the village gods it is not indigenous to Tamil Nadu and remains a semi-mythical creature to most villagers. During the second millennium BC, when the Ayrans (who were horse breeding people) migrated to India, they were empowered by the added mobility and status of their horses to dominate the local people. Over time, the horse has become an important symbol in village and tribal worship throughout India.

Some shrines are small, containing just a few statues and horses, others may be spread out over a large area of an acre or so, with a central temple building containing the major

Opposite: Detail of horse, 4m (13ft) high at a shrine in Pudukkottai district. Life-sized terracotta horses are offered at shrines to provide transportation for *Ayanaar*'s spirit soldiers, enabling them to travel through the villages and fields at night to protect against evil. Details of harness, reins and saddle are always incorporated so that the horse is 'ready to go' at a moment's notice whenever *Ayanaar* needs to ride him.



Top, left: Bulls are offered as well as domestic animals and household pests such as rats and snakes, all made from terracotta.

Top, right: Ayanaar's spirit soldiers ready to protect the villagers from harm at a shrine in Pudukkottai district. They will perform their duties at night and many villagers are fearful of crossing their path lest they be beaten to death.

Left: The largest terracotta structures ever made such as this 5m (16.7ft) high horse in the Cuddalore area are supported by a central pillar and fired in situ at the shrine.

gods (the original thatched hut has usually been replaced with a permanent cement structure). Outside are rows of horses, bulls, statues of deities and soldiers, as well as domestic animals and household pests such as snakes and rats, all made from terracotta. These larger shrines often appear crowded, as every three years the deities are changed, the new ones placed at the front and those offerings of previous years moved to the back. The large horses, which can be as high as 5m (16.7ft) – the largest terracotta sculptures ever known – cannot be easily moved. As a new one is added the older ones are turned to face a different direction and interesting juxtapositions evolve from the many forms of haphazardly placed statues and animals. The focal point



This shrine at Urapetti, Pudukkotai district, has hundreds of life size animal and human terracottas in various stages of disintegration and decay. These 4m (13ft) high horses are over a hundred years old and line the path leading to the shrine. Over the years they become weathered by monsoons and covered with lichen.

of the shrine is a painted statue of *Ayanaar*, either in clay or cement, expressing authority as he administers justice and advice to his devotees. His two consorts *Purna* and *Puskala* are often depicted with him – *Purna* representing desire, giving *Ayanaar* the desire to protect, and *Puskala* representing action, enabling *Ayanaar* to carry out his duties.

Most shrines have a subsidiary shrine for the demon god *Karappan*; whereas *Ayanaar* is a protector and a vegetarian (he is offered sweet *pongal*, a mixture of rice, fruit and milk) *Karappan* represents the darker side, his alter ego who requires blood sacrifice such as chickens and goats for appeasement. Other deities are worshipped such as the Mother Goddess *Celaianman* for those who want children; the *Munivar*, ferocious, cruel gods armed with knives and requiring blood sacrifice to remain appeased; and the Seven Mothers who are worshipped by young virgins.

For a Western potter to enter such a place is an awesome experience; the towering horses are monumental and powerful. Their sheer size and force of numbers, maybe as many as several hundred, invites a response of great reverence for the skill of the potters who made them. A

strong sense of the cycle of birth and death, of creation and destruction, is all-pervading, as the terracotta's can be seen at every stage – the most recently offered are still covered with paint, and the oldest are crumbling into sherds in the process of being re-absorbed into the earth. I have visited some sites where there are hundreds of lifesize animal terracottas in various stages of disintegration, some over a century old, weathered by the monsoons and covered with lichen.

The huge horses are usually donated on behalf of a group of people or even a whole village at times of great stress such as a cholera epidemic, a drought, or a famine. When a child is sick or a couple infertile, *Ayanaar*'s help is requested by an individual villager through the intermediary priest who, in Tamil Nadu, is a local potter. This priest, representing *Ayanaar*, may suggest that if the wish is granted the devotee should offer in return a terracotta horse, in which case the potter is commissioned to make a horse whose size will depend on affordability. Sometimes bulls or elephants are substituted – for the soldiers of *Ayanaar* to ride upon – and if rats or snakes invade the villagers' houses, their forms are also made in clay and placed in the shrine in the hope that





Recently painted statues at an *Ayanaar* shrine in Pudukkottai district. Commercial paint is starting to replace the traditional natural pigments (seen on the horses flanking the statues). As the statues become weathered the paint disappears and gradually over the years will disintegrate and become reabsorbed by the earth. A strong sense of the cycles of birth and death, of creation and destruction is all-pervading at the shrines.

the god will intervene to protect the donor from such pests. A cradle representing a sick child can be offered by hanging it on a tree near the god at the moment the parents plead for intervention. Sometimes statues of newlyweds are placed asking *Ayanaar* to bless them with health, wealth and fertility. Dogs are offered in their capacity to act as watchdogs for the temple and the villager.

People believe that when things go well it is only because they have done everything to please *Ayanaar* and, conversely, when things go badly, then *Ayanaar* is angry and offerings need to be made to appease him. If a villager falls out of a palm tree, for instance, his misfortune would be blamed on *Ayanaar*'s displeasure. If an epidemic attacks the village, *Ayanaar* would be blamed, resulting in the donation of horses and deities. In times of drought, when food is scarce, it is considered a priority to contribute money and make offerings to the statues first before considering personal needs.

Opposite: Two 100cm (40in.) high statues of *Karappan* who represents the alter ego of *Ayanaar* (his darker side). Whereas *Ayanaar* is a benign protective force offered vegetarian food, *Karappan* requires blood sacrifice such as chickens and goats for appeasement.

The annual *Ayanaar* festival depends on the timing of the harvest, falling within the months of March/April/May, and is when the villager gives the horse he has promised to *Ayanaar*. In *A Village Art of South India*, Stephen Inglis describes preparations for such a festival, the first at this temple for ten years:

In Valaiyapatti, a village close to a mountain temple, a long shed of bamboo and coco-thatch had been constructed in a fallow field. There, up to twelve potters worked daily, making mud figures for a great festival. I made two visits to this place, two weeks apart. Fifty full-size horse figures had already been modelled and were drying in the shed (several weeks work at least) by my first visit. The second time I came, fifty more horses and bulls had been added to those as well as a great number of smaller figures. At this time, firing of some of the figures was in progress but considerable work remained in firing, assembling and painting. The date on which the figures

were to be taken to the village temple (the date of the festival itself) was at this time characteristically vague. I had come the second time on the day which, two weeks earlier, was considered likely as the festival day. Typically, several dates are proposed for any village function one may enquire about in advance. This is often a polite form of admission that no one knows for sure or that no date has been set. This is understandable, especially if the enquiry is made any distance from the actual village involved. A temple such as the one for which this festival was being arranged is semi-mythical to people living only ten miles away. Few have seen it; most would have heard about it only through gossip.

The villagers carry to the shrine their brightly painted and flower bedecked horses in a procession, accompanied by singing, music, chanting and the offering of incense, oil and fruit. The horses are placed before the seated statue of the god and the priest who, in a state of trance, and possessed by the spirit, asks *Ayanaar* to give life to the statues. A potter describes how the statues are brought to life:

When we make statues of horses and elephants and deities and take them to the temple we sacrifice a bird, grind some rice and sing a song. The nail of a hen is cut and the blood is placed on the eyes of the *Ayanaar* statue. Only by placing this blood on *Ayanaar*'s eyes will the statues of the horses and elephants get life. While we sing the song some rice is thrown – now *Ayanaar* has opened his eyes and been given life too.

The priest, acting as the god's mouthpiece, answers questions from the devotees and advises them on future action to solve their problems. When the spirit leaves him he returns to his home, exhausted, to recover.

Stephen Inglis describes a festival to renew the terracotta statues of gods in the village temple:

This is a time for people to commission small offerings to be placed with the new figures of the gods at their installation and a time for old concerns to be dropped and new ones attended to. Most of all, it is a time for the village people to make special contact with their gods after a long interval and, for many, to relax and have a good time.

The festival really begins when the village leaders meet and decide that the time is right. This happens once every two or three years at most temples. After a decision to hold a festival has been taken, approval of the god most directly concerned is often sought before a date is chosen. In some cases, village people will gather in the temple at a certain time and wait to hear a lizard call from a tall palm tree, this being an indication of the god's approval. In other cases the *pujari* may have a dream during which the god appears or gives some indication of his will. I have been told that this dream is often 'checked' by a necessary coincidental dream of someone else possibly to discourage a *pujari* from dreaming up too many festivals to

his economic advantage. In the case of animal sacrifice, some indication of the god's acceptance of the offering is sometimes sought before the sacrifice takes place. This may take the form of a sacrificial goat tossing its head, indicating god's approval.

The leaders of the village of Pappakuti had decided to renew the statues of gods in several of their village temples. The making of the statues was done in the potters' homes in a neighbouring village.

By three o'clock in the afternoon of the day of the festival, the mud figures were only just completed and the *pujari* and his assistants were hard at work preparing them to be carried four miles to Pappakuti. There were fifteen figures to be included in the procession. Three large horse figures (two with small *Ayanaar* figures riding) and one large bull were each padded on the sides with bundles of straw and fixed, using elaborate rope knotting. With six or seven potters working, the two life size figures of *Karappan* and *Conaiya* were tied into palanquin-type wooden chairs well padded with straw.

All the figures were now in the large courtyard and excitement was mounting. During these final preparations, the village leader from Pappakuti had arrived and begun giving orders. His people were paying for the festival and he seemed to be expected to take charge. Pappakuti villagers were joining the locals in the street outside the potters' main courtyard and the hired drummers were warming up. The hired dancers, who had been dressing and making up at another potter's house began a folk dance done with a pot balanced on the head. The dancers included a woman, a clown, and two beautiful transvestites. They had brought with them two drummers playing the Tamil double headed drum, and two others playing a clarinet-like horn. The dancers included very erotic movements in their dances. Two policeman circulated through the throng. I was assured that this was to stop people from 'beating each other with sticks after smoking ganja and drinking arrack' (marijuana and palm liquor). Fortunately, although many people were drunk, the police were not called upon except to enjoy the festivities.

At six o'clock in the evening the life-size god figures were dressed in shining gold and scarlet turbans, vestis (Tamil men's lower body cloth) and scarves, and the large horse and bull figures were dressed in sari-like cloths. The twilight scene was by this time lit with kerosene pressure lamps mounted on tall poles. These were carried by men and women hired for the occasion and would light the procession to Pappakuti.

When the dressing was complete, the village leader and the *pujaris* gathered in front of the figure of *Conaiya* and a cock was killed and its blood dripped about. As the cock was killed, a bell was rung. The bell is an important symbol in village worship; some village temples consist only of a collection of bells to 'call' the god and attract his attention to the worship taking place.

From this point in the program things moved very quickly. Many rituals similar to regular *puja* in Brahmanical temples were performed; mantras were chanted, incense burnt,



Each region has its own style, some more stylised or more abstract. Gradually designs are incorporating the influence of film, television and commercial art. These 5m (16.7ft) high elephants and horses are an older style from a shrine alongside the road between Pudukkottai and Thanjavur.

camphor lit and holy ash distributed. Coconuts were broken and plantains offered. At a signal, the figures were lifted and the procession began with skyrockets exploding overhead. This was the emotional climax of the festival. The people jumped with raised arms in a moment of transporting joy.

Each of the small figures was carried by a single man, his head cushioned by a straw nest. Each large animal figure was carried by four men supported by poles on their shoulders. The large figures of the gods led the way, each carried on the shoulders of at least thirty men. In this way the procession followed the drummers and dancers down the village towards Pappakuti.

On arrival at Pappakuti the figures were first taken to the village square where the people came during the night, some brought offerings of grain that would eventually go to the *pujari*. Between two and four o'clock in the morning, the new statues were distributed among the three local temples where the *pujaris* rearranged the statues, moving back the old to make room for the new and offering *puja* for local people. After dawn, six goats were sacrificed in succession by various supporters of *Conaiya* and his temple. The *pujari* decapitated these goats just outside the temple doorway with a knife. The priest kept the heads while the owners carried away the carcasses on poles. A steady stream of villagers visited the temple during the morning with plates of coconut, fruit, and flowers to offer to the god. *Prasatam* (holy food) was being cooked and distributed.

After the festival the terracottas are left at the shrine where they will remain to become eroded through time, their function of being presented to and accepted by god completed. The shrines represent a kind of graveyard of offered horses, elephants, bulls and figures which are pushed back each year to make space for new donations.

Gradually the art of terracotta is being replaced by cement animals and figures which will be more permanent and not require the ever decreasing resources of clay and wood. Because of its durability cement is regarded as having a higher status than clay, and so a more fitting material from which to fashion the horses and statues for the deities. Natural earth coloured paints are being replaced with bright acrylics, and traditional designs are incorporating the influence of film, television and commercial art. One can see in the shrines the contrast of modern styles – resembling caricatures of fairground carousel horses – with work made a generation ago where the forms are more abstract and restrained.

Unfortunately, the time constraints around my research do not enable me to visit Tamil Nadu during the *Ayanaar* festival season when I would see horses being made, so contact is made (through Ray Meeker, an American potter/architect living in Pondicherry) with Palinasamy, a potter who demonstrates his art in major cities throughout India and also makes horses commercially. Through Ray I am able to commission a horse and record the whole making and firing process.



The village of Duvaradimanai, Pudukkottai district, Tamil Nadu. Houses are made of mud with tiled or palm thatch roofs and spaced out for the *Ayanaar* horse to pass in between them easily at night. Piles of pots are everywhere, drying in the sun in preparation for firing or stacked up as stock against the house walls.

Because the making time is relatively short in proportion to the drying time, I am privileged to spend long days in the potter's house, observing his life and that of the community of potters around him.

The village of Duvaradimanai lies in a flat plain of the river Kuntaru about 23km (15 miles) from the town of Pudokkattai, halfway between Madurai and Thanjavur. Approach to the village is along dirt tracks 5km (3 miles) off the main road through fields of rice, banana, cashew nut, ground nut and eucalyptus, owned by a large landowner. Most days we pass through these fields they are inhabited by groups of monkeys and peacocks foraging for food. The landscape is dry because the monsoon has failed for three years; there has been severe hardship in the area and many young men have gone to the cities to find work. The edge of the village is defined by palm trees which separate it from the surrounding paddy fields.

Three distinctive horseshoe kilns placed at the entrance to the village, and the subsequent sight of piles of fired pots around the houses, together with sounds of beating, announce to the visitor that this is a potters' community. There are 60 families here making pottery – mostly a range of vessels for water and grain storage, vessels for cooking, several designs of cooking stoves, plus chicken coops and large vessels for feeding animals. Votive horses, animals and statues are also made by a few families. Working potters are already diminishing here and either working as labourers or leaving their community for the cities to take up service jobs.

Houses in the village are made of mud with tiled or palm thatch roofs, spaced out for the horse to pass easily through, each with its own yard containing the cooking area, kiln and piles of locally collected thorny bush and dry leaves for cooking fuel. The houses are placed haphazardly, without defining fences or boundaries, and built upon ground of compressed mud dotted with trees. The village has electricity but the water pump installed by the government three years ago has stopped functioning because of the monsoon failure so the villagers have to walk five minutes across the paddy fields to the drinking well. There are two other wells on the outskirts of the village for washing, and ablutions are conducted in the fields.

Palinasamy's house lies on the edge of the village. It has two central rooms surrounded on all sides by an 2.4m (8ft) wide porch, raised about 0.6m (2ft) above the ground to protect against snakes and insects. It is constructed of wood with mud walls, a mud floor and a clay tiled roof which also covers the porch. Palm thatch removable screens are hung from the roof to the outside of the porch for privacy and protection against the elements of intense sunshine and heavy monsoon rain. The two central rooms function as gigantic cupboards, one containing their entire stock of pots and the other the family deity and shrine which we are never allowed to see. The family lives on the porch: one end is the kitchen with clay stoves, clay cooking vessels and two huge clay grain containers; at the other end is the wheel and working area. There are no possessions or furniture – the family

sleeps directly on the compressed mud floor and their few extra clothes are hung over the wooden beams. Outside is the family's yard area of about 15m² (50ft²), containing a row of five waterpots under a tree – these will supply drinking, cooking and washing water for the family each day. A washing line is suspended between *neem* trees and there is a secondary cooking area with two clay stoves. This outside area is used for the clay activities of wedging clay and drying pots. It is where the children play and neighbours come together to gossip. The kiln is about 50m (163ft) from the house.

Two brothers, Palinasamy and Shakthivel, live with their father, unmarried sister, wives and children in an extended family of nine members. Palinasamy and Shakthivel (who is deaf) make the votive terracotta statues, and their father Darmilingam, helped by the three women in the family, produces a range of domestic vessels. During the monsoon in November/December their pottery work is diminished and they work for the local landowner as labourers in the fields.

Palinasamy, now in his early 30s, left school at the age of ten and was trained by his grandfather. Years ago the temple authorities appointed selected potters to make votive horses and statues, and this right is passed from father to son. Within this village there are eight families who have this right and Palinasamy's is one of them. He also learnt from a terracotta master in the village of Aranthangi 12km (7.5miles) away; he stayed there for five months and

developed the technique he uses today. For some years he has relinquished this right of authorised temple terracotta maker as he has built up contacts for commercial orders from businessmen who will re-sell the statues to hotels, restaurants and private collectors. He also gets called by the Crafts Councils to demonstrate in major cities throughout India. Although he earns little money ('My income is for eating – I can't save money to buy land'), he takes pride in his work and feels a responsibility to continue the work of his ancestors, hoping that he can improve on their skills. He is respected within his community, whereas if he went to the city like his brother (who works in Madras as a cashier) he could earn more but would be in a servile position and lose his independence. The standard of living here could be described as at subsistence level; diet is basically rice and vegetables and should anyone become sick or require a dowry for marriage they would have to borrow money.

A group of 20 potters applied for a loan of 100,000 rupees from a government-run organisation to improve their pottery technology. In order to secure the loan they would have to have bribed the government officials 4,000 rupees and so decided to withdraw. The problem of bribery within the ranks of government employees is rife throughout India and we hear similar stories from potters everywhere who, although eligible for government loans, have little power of redress against this kind of corruption because of their low status.



From left to right:
Palinasamy, Lakshmi,
Sundarambal, Shakthivel,
Manikkam and
Darmalingam plus
their children, from
Duvaradimanai,
Tamil Nadu.

Day 1

There are auspicious times for work to begin and we start at 8.30am when a *puja* is performed to purify the tools and making area in order for the horse to be a success. After the god has accepted the offerings of banana and coconut we are given the blessed food to eat, our foreheads smeared with holy ash, and Palinasamy can start work.

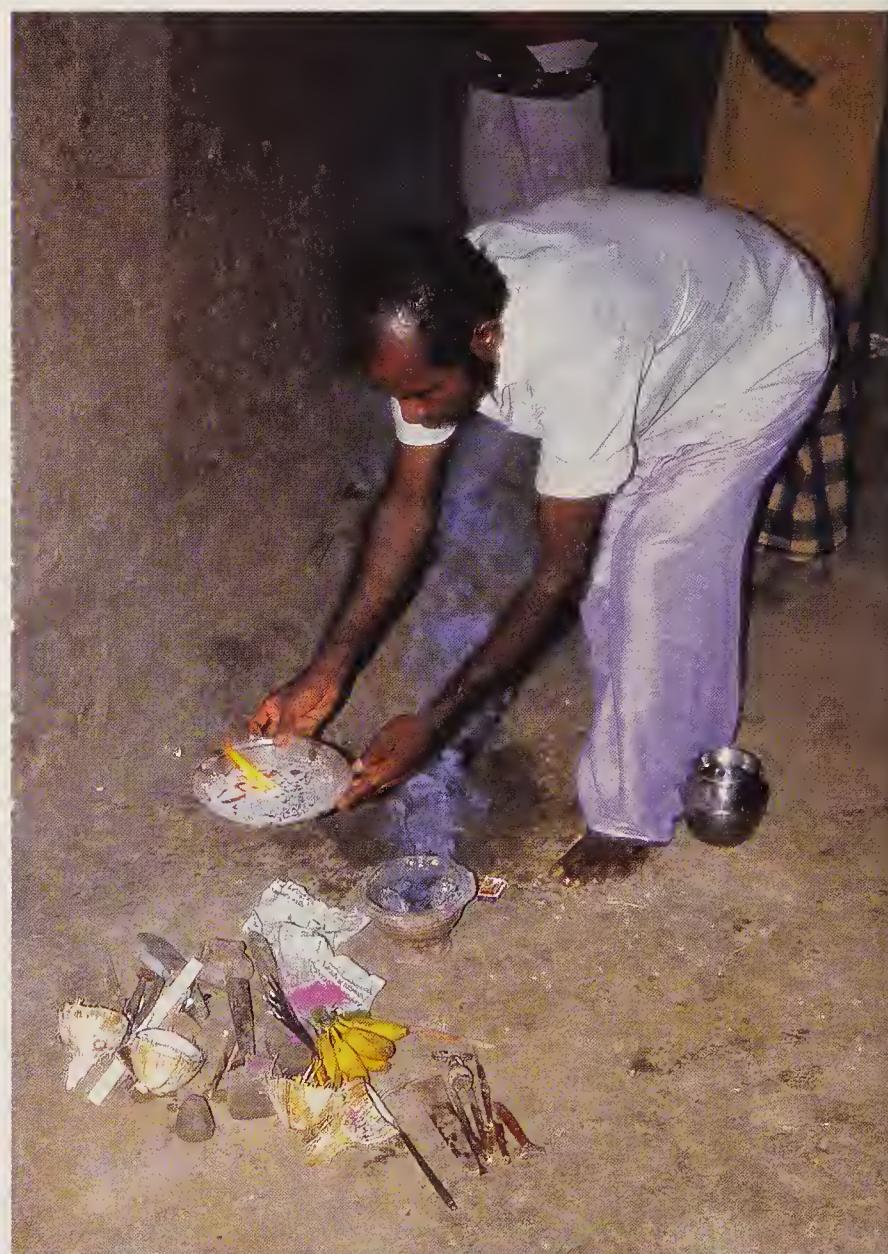
It is Shakthivel's job to collect the clay on his bicycle from the river 5km (3.1 miles) away. It is dry now but in the monsoon the clay sites are flooded and the landowner will require payment, so stocks are stored as much as possible. Sometimes a bullock cart is hired for bulk transportation. The clay is a mixture of kiln ash, local sand, rice husk and river clay. The dry ash, sand and husk are put onto the ground and covered with the wet clay. Shakthivel mixes it together with his feet, gradually adding water and systematically compressing it by stamping with one foot while turning with the other. He performs a kind of rhythmic dance on the clay. Then he forms the clay into a mound, slices pieces with his hands and slaps it back onto the top. The prepared clay is stored in polythene. We are incredulous that such a small mound will turn into a life-size horse.

Palinasamy and Shakthivel start working on the legs. The stone pivot supporting the wheel is oiled with *neem* tree oil and a 7.5cm (3in.) thick coil of soft clay is laid in a ring on the wheelhead; this will form the base of the leg. (The wheelhead is made from a mixture of mud and coconut fibre covered with cement.) The coil is pinched with the hands to gain height and thin the wall whilst the wheel is turned with the right foot. A second and third coil are made and attached to the ring. Now Shakthivel starts a second leg in a similar way; the brothers are working side by side, checking the diameters with a stick to ensure they are the same. After building up the legs to about 0.6m (2ft), they are placed outside in the sun to dry. It has taken only 20 minutes to make the first part of the leg which is 1.25cm (1/2 in.) thick. After one and a half hours' drying, Palinasamy starts thinning and widening the legs by beating the clay walls with a wooden paddle against a stone held at the same level on the inside. This is the same technique used in pot making all over India. The diameters of the four legs are compared and one is beaten a little more to match the others.

Now the legs are moved into the shade. During a second beating an hour later Palinasamy wets the paddle as the clay is considerably drier; this increases the height by 10cm (4in.) and decreases the thickness to 8mm (1/3in.). A third beating takes place a further hour later. This is less forceful and is followed by dipping the paddle into water and smoothing it across the surface. Now the walls are a 6mm (1/4in.) thick. We begin to understand how the small mound of clay will

turn into a lifesize horse. More clay is taken from the mound and the brothers join additional coils by pressing the soft clay onto the harder top ring, using upward pinching and pulling movements to thin and smooth it. Within five minutes these new coils have grown 30cm (12in.). Now the length of each leg is measured with a stick, the diameter with a piece of string and the sizes adjusted accordingly. The horse is made in four sections: lower leg, upper thigh and body, neck and head, and ears. A ledge is formed around the edge of this first section to fit into the next thigh portion.

They are planning for the horse to be 3m (10ft) high. By mid-afternoon the height of the legs is 0.9m (3ft) and their diameter 34cm (13.5in.). Some liquid clay slip is smoothed over the surface to cover up the coarse rice husk which will otherwise burn holes into the surface.



Before work can commence on the horse, a *puja* is performed to bless the tools and making area and ask the deity for successful completion.



The family's main production lies in vessel making and the techniques employed for building a horse are the same.

Palinasamy begins coiling the legs on the wheel which he turns with his foot. A ring of ash will prevent the soft clay sticking to the wheel.



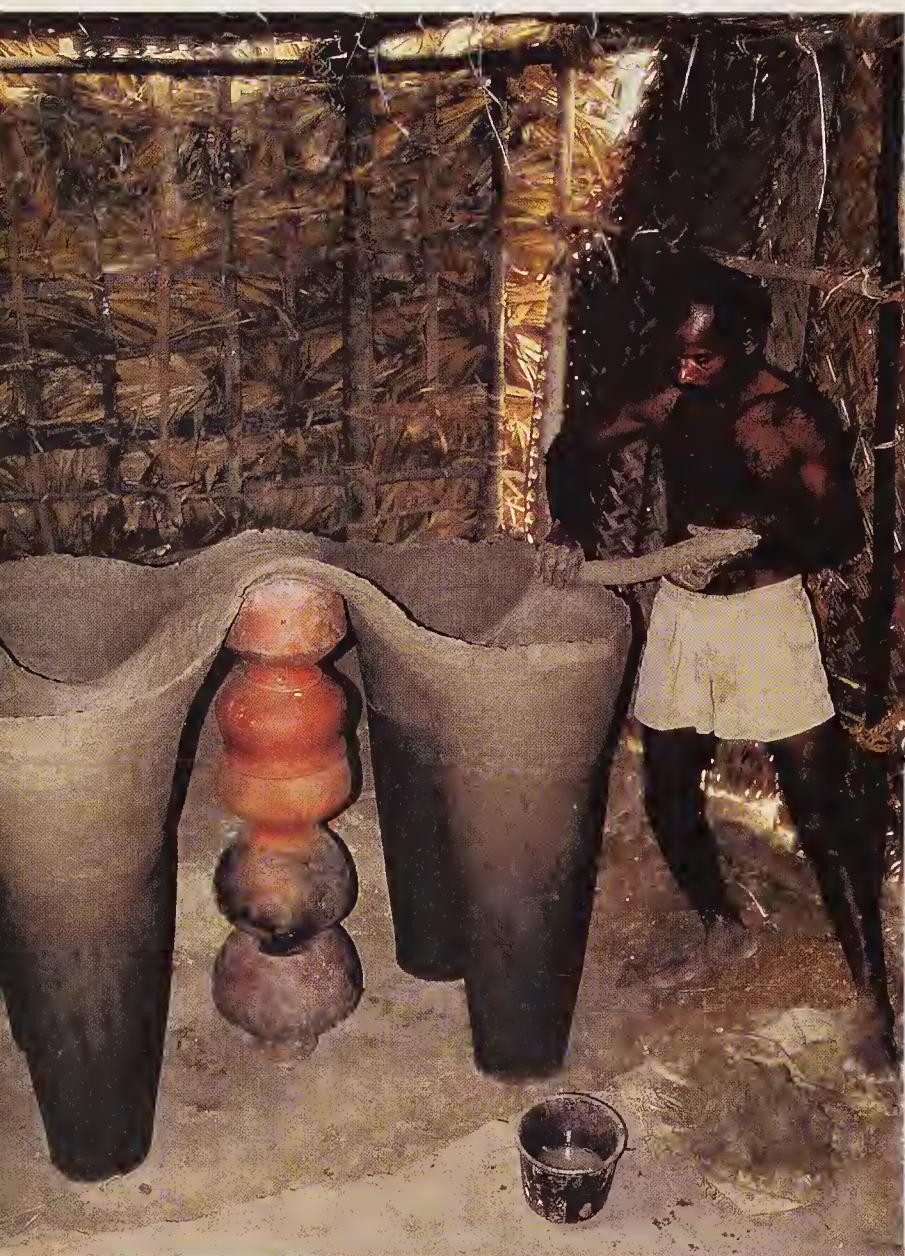
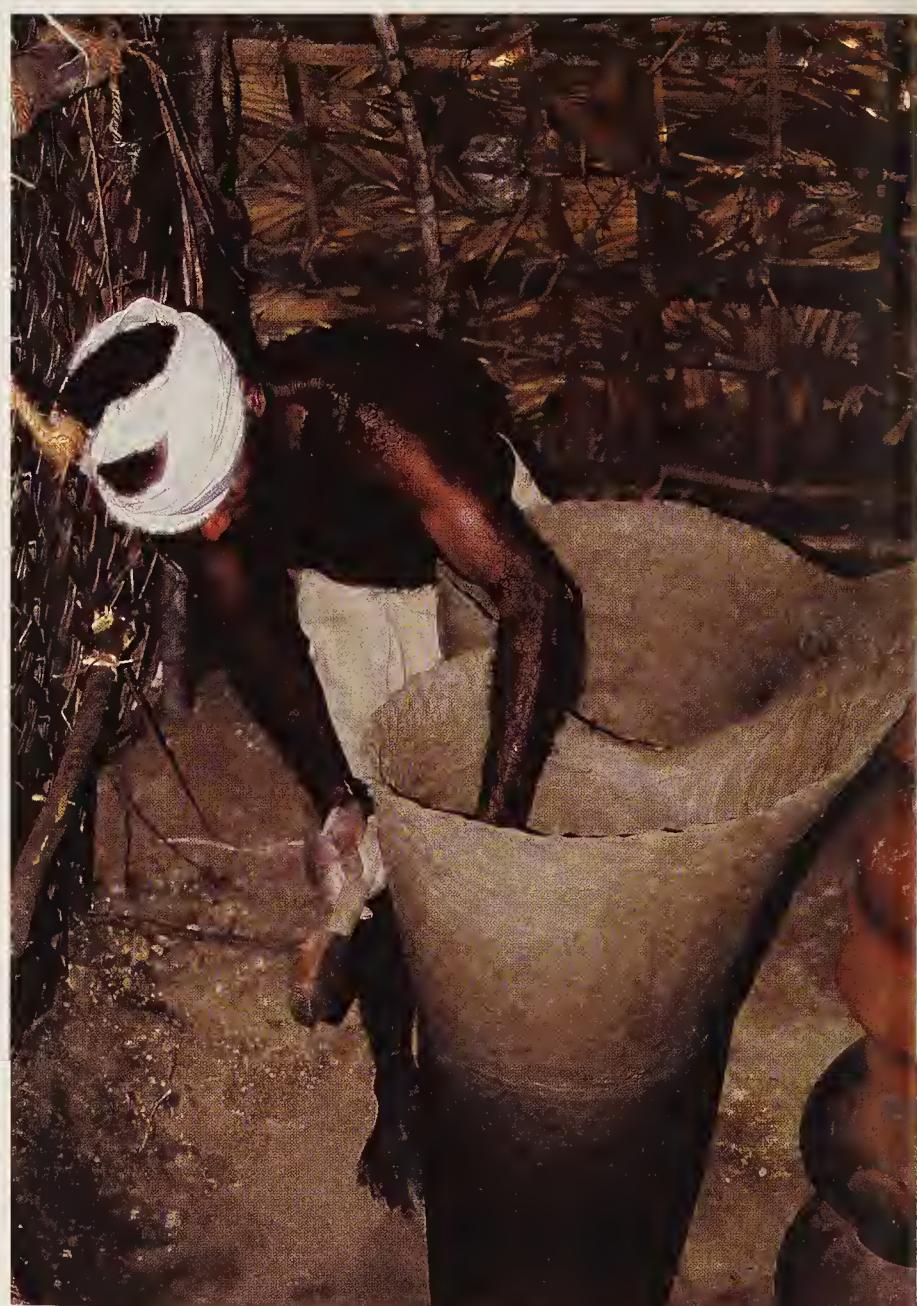
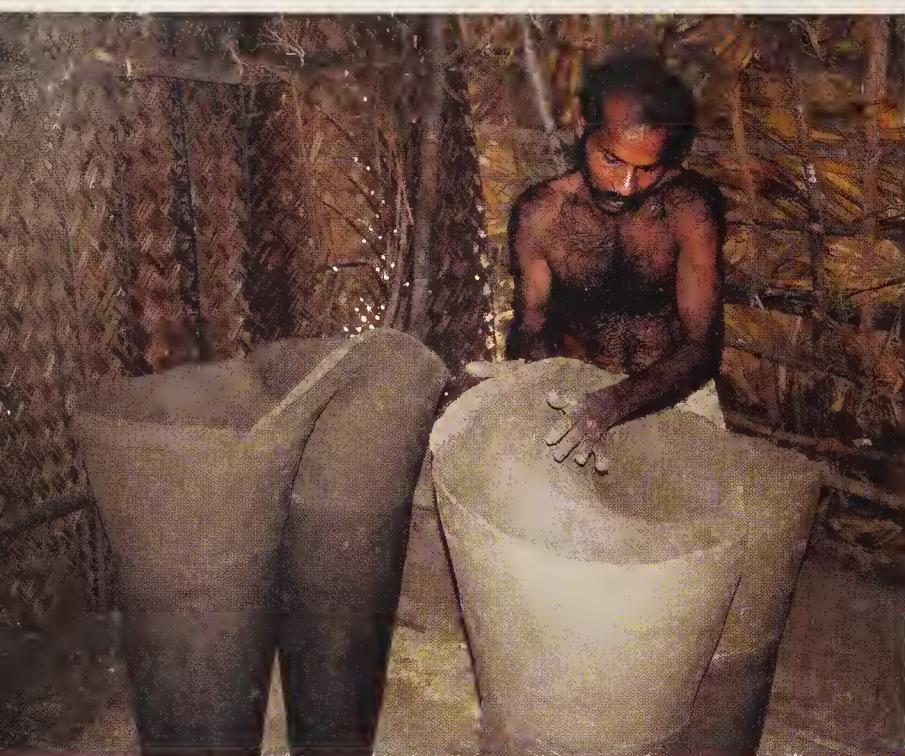
The horse is made in four sections: legs, body, neck/head and ears. The four legs have been coiled and beaten and a ledge added to support the next section of thighs and body which has been started on the two back legs. Palinasamy measures the distance between front and back legs.

Day 2

When we arrive at 9am Shakthivel is preparing clay and Palinasamy starts to beat the legs again to compress the slurry onto the surface before polishing with a wooden tool. Some ash is placed around the top of the four legs to prevent sticking, and the next section of thigh is begun using the same techniques of coiling, pinching and smoothing. After a couple of hours drying time, Shakthivel starts to beat the four thighs to a 6mm ($\frac{1}{4}$ in.) thick.

Now Palinasamy, helped by his father Darmalingam, places the four legs into position, measuring the distances between front and back legs until they are satisfied. These measurements are crucial as they will dictate the finished proportion of the horse. At midday Palinasamy starts to join the two front legs and then the two back legs together with thick soft coils. By mid afternoon they have dried enough to join the front to the back by forming the underbelly, which has to be supported by five inverted pots. Darmalingam is sitting outside directing Palinasamy and giving advice, although he has never made statues – he has worked solely as a potter. By late afternoon a neighbour joins in with the next beating process and another 10cm (4in.) are added.

At intervals during the day, we are offered sweet tea with milk by Sundarambal (Shakthivel's wife) who also prepares and serves the lunches (as the youngest daughter-in-law these are her designated tasks). Each day we take grains and vegetables for the family and eat lunch prepared by the two women. We sit cross-legged on the porch next to the kitchen area, and banana leaves are placed in front of us (everyday plates in Tamil Nadu). Rice and vegetables are served and I avoid the embarrassment of trying to eat with my fingers by carrying a spoon with me. It is traditional for the family to eat in rotation, not together. First the guests, then the men, then the children and lastly the women. During the



Top, left: The front and back legs have been joined together with coils and Palinasamy begins to form the underbelly. He works very quickly but needs to allow long drying periods for the clay walls to dry sufficiently in order to avoid collapse.

Top, right: The walls are thinned, heightened and refined by beating with a wooden paddle and stone anvil – the same technique used for pot making throughout India.

Left: The belly is supported with a stack of fired pots. The three inch thick coils are squeezed into the edge of the clay wall as Palinasamy walks around the horse.

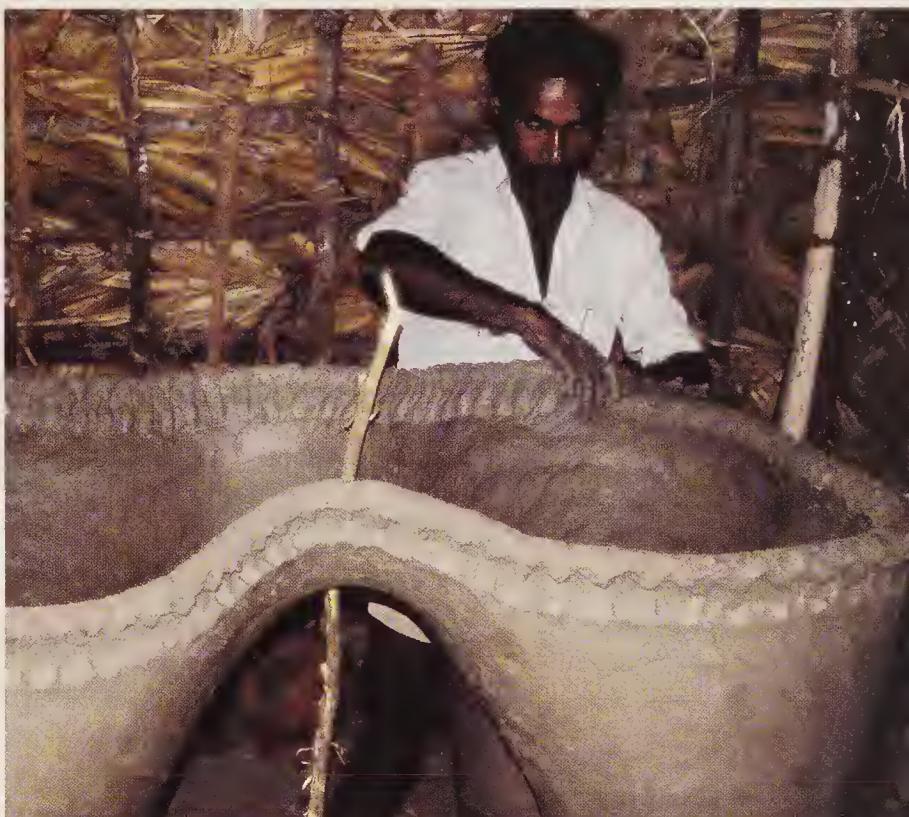
second week we are here I learn that at the end of the meal I have been folding the banana leaf the wrong way indicating I didn't enjoy the food, but this social faux pas is tolerated with amusement as I am a foreigner.

Day 3

We arrive to see Darmalingam throwing water vessels and his daughter Selvarani is sitting beside him turning the wheel with a fast repeated flicking action of her hand and wrist. She sits stoically for four hours, alternating hands every five minutes or so as her arm begins to ache, until her father has thrown 31 large pots. This laborious technique is the traditional way of turning the wheel in this area. At 8pm last night the middle portion of the horse started to crack and was mended, then the supporting pots were replaced with a stick. Today Palinasamy starts building more coils to form the body of the horse. Its size is growing before our eyes at a remarkable speed; each 7.5cm (3in.) coil is transformed into 12.5cm (5in.) height within minutes.

Normally the making process for such a large horse would take a month and alternate with day-to-day production work. We are working to a deadline and there is constant anxiety about the weather, which is unseasonably humid and slowing the crucial drying times; they had expected to build up to the neck today but the body is not yet stiff enough to support it. They move some of the palm thatch away to hopefully encourage the wind and speed up the drying process. When the commission was first organised, Ray Meeker reminded me that, 'Clay is the Master', and as a potter myself I understand that to push the material beyond its limitations will result in disaster.

While the horse is drying we take the taxi to visit some local shrines in the area, taking Kennedy our translator, Palinasamy and Shakthivel. Their local shrine is about 3km (1.9 miles) away; we stop at the tea stall so that Palinasamy can ask permission from the *pujari* (priest) for us to enter. The shrine is surrounded by trees on the edge of the village and as we approach it we take off our shoes as a mark of respect. Inside there are statues of *Ayanaar* and *Karappan* and many votive horses of various sizes leading up to a simple temple which contains more statues. The brothers proudly point out to us the statues they have made and Shakthivel leads Indru (my companion and interpreter) into the temple to show her the *Ayanaar* figure he made two years ago. Suddenly, the *pujari* appears shouting that women should not go into that part of the shrine. He starts to enter a trance state, becoming the mediator for *Karappan*, shaking with rage and asking for 100 rupees to do a *puja* in order to appease the angry god. Palinasamy prostrates himself on the ground asking for forgiveness. Although *Ayanaar* is his primary family deity, Palinasamy has derived many benefits



Top: An animal feeding vessel made by a combination of throwing, coiling and beating in the village of Duvaradimanai. The pivoted block wheel is turned by hand, usually by a wife or daughter of the potter's family.

Above: The stack of fired pots supporting the belly has been replaced with a stick now that the clay has stiffened sufficiently. Palinasamy has added another coil which will be beaten to double its height.

from worshipping *Karappan* and does not want to offend him. We give the *pujari* a 100 rupee note, plus a coin, and he becomes calmer, much to my relief. Now he is saying that *Karappan* will only be happy when he has a cement roof to replace the thatch on the temple. We decide to decline an offer to fund this project. This is a worrying situation for the two brothers because if anything goes wrong in the village they will automatically think it has been caused by *Karappan's* anger. By implication it is also worrying for us and we ask whether we should provide money to perform a further *puja* to appease the *pujari* but Palinasamy says not. We continue to visit shrines without incident.

Day 4

Today when we arrive Shakthivel is turning the wheel for his father. They started throwing at 7am and by 8.30am there are 26 pots lined up in the sun drying. In South India pots are thrown on the hump and removed with a hole in the bottom which is closed during the beating process. Sundarambal had spent three hours last night closing the bottoms of the 31 pots thrown by her father-in-law and today she and Lakshmi started the secondary beating at 5am. The potters' day all over India is a hard one, starting before dawn and ending after sunset. Pots are beaten two or three times depending on size, each beating thinning the wall, enlarging and refining the shape. There are strict divisions of labour within potter families. The women in this village sieve the ash, prepare the slip, colour and paint it onto the pots, perform the polishing, help carry work to the kiln, assist with unloading, then take care of carrying pots to market and selling. Their contribution is imperative to the production of pottery and terracotta within the family, as well as performing all the usual household and child-rearing duties.

Palinasamy is not a tall man – about 1.65m (5ft 6in.); now he has to stand on a stool in order to continue the building process and perform feats of balancing as he pinches, pulls, beats and smoothes the clay. He places the stool at an alarming angle with its legs on different heights and the fourth one swinging in the air. The stool overbalances and I catch my breath as he nearly falls onto the horse. Meanwhile Shakthivel starts to make an *Ayanaar* statue flanked by his consorts *Purna* and *Puskala*, directed by his father who gestures to him where and how he should build it. Despite his hearing impairment Shakthivel communicates very well through mime and gesture. To learn formal sign language would mean going to the city – not an affordable option for a village potter.

I am watching Palinasamy's neighbour Ganeshan who has rented a bullock cart which he and his daughter are loading with 300 pots, representing six weeks' work. With rope around their necks, the pots are tied one by one to a wooden

trellis structure fixed to the cart. Later he harnesses two hired oxen and sets off with food and a lantern to travel 30km (18 miles) to a nearby village. Tomorrow he will either sell the pots or exchange them for rice, travelling to further villages until all the pots are sold. This is one of the standard ways for potters in this area to sell their work in bulk. Once a week Lakshmi (Palinasamy's wife) walks 15km (9 miles) to the market, carrying a basket of pots on her head which she sells, returning on the bus with vegetables.

Day 5

The horse is growing too large for Palinasamy to continue building the body. He is discussing with his father and four neighbours how to take the bottom leg sections away to decrease the height. The six men lift up the horse and Selvarani and Lakshmi carry the lower legs to the back of the porch. The remaining leg portions are filled with sand to stabilise the horse and stop it moving while the building process continues. Palinasamy is relieved that this part is over without any mishaps. There is often not enough manpower to assist with the lifting.



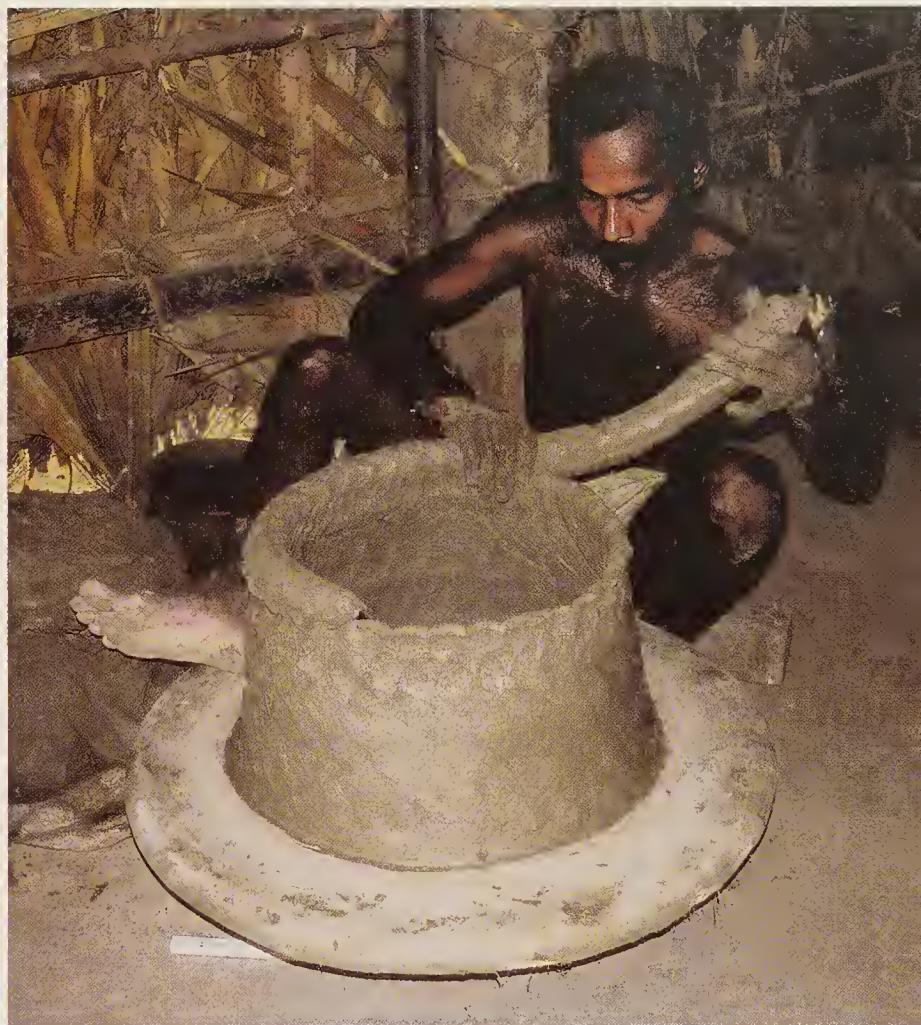
Palinasamy needs to stand on a stool in order to reach the edge of the horse.



The legs have been removed and a second ledge formed to support the neck and head. Manikkam covers the surface with a smooth slip made from the pot making clay (minus the fibrous rice husk). It will be burnished with a wooden tamarind tool.

Palinasamy's uncle Manikkam, an upright handsome man in his 70s, arrives from a village 30km (18 miles) away; word was sent that help was needed. He immediately starts to help close in the back body and leaves a hole for the tail; with two of them working together progress is much faster. Within an hour the body and the lower neck are finished. A ledge is made for the top neck and head section to fit into. Yesterday Palinasamy was worried that the humidity was slowing the making and drying, but as soon as his uncle appears his face relaxes. Manikkam is obviously a great master at the art of terracotta and works with immense confidence and speed.

Shakthivel has gone on his bicycle to collect firewood for the firing; he arrives at midday covered in sweat, with a huge pile of palm tree root which he has dug out and cut from a site 15km (9 miles) away. His wife meets him with water to drink and, after unloading, he cycles off to the well to have a bath. Now Manikkam is covering the surface with slurry from the pottery making to fill in any cracks or holes. The horse is beginning to look very round and shapely and it



Palinasamy coiling the neck on the wheel while turning it with his foot. He works very quickly; within fifteen minutes the neck is 60cm (24in.) high and 45cm (17in.) in diameter.

strikes me that Palinasamy and Manikkam are caressing it with the kind of love and devotion a man would bestow upon the body of a treasured lover. This love and devotion is reserved for their god whom they worship and adore above any other living thing including their wives, their children and themselves. This phenomenon is unknown to most Westerners whose spiritual life has greatly diminished during the latter part of the 20th century.

After lunch Palinasamy starts to prepare clay for the head and neck section. He measures the diameter of the neck then marks it out on the wheel. He sprinkles sand on the wheel and starts to build up the neck with 7.5cm (3in.) coils of soft clay, raising each coil to a height of 12.5cm (5in.) with pinching and smoothing actions; the same techniques as he used for the legs and body. Within fifteen minutes the neck is 60cm (2ft) high and 45cm (18in.) diameter. Suddenly it is raining! A look of horror appears on everyone's faces as they rush to cover the horse with polythene. It only lasts for a few minutes but the raindrops are enormous and potentially hazardous.

Now Manikkam is burnishing the surface of the body with a wooden tamarind tool before starting to add the harness while Palinasamy is beating the neck to thin and refine it. From time to time he stands away from the body and neck to check the proportions. Before we leave during the late afternoon Palinasamy forms a ridge on one side of the neck to represent the mane and starts to curve the top where it will become the head. Manikkam indicates to Shakthivel that the proportions of his *Ayanaar* statue are wrong and need to be changed – he pulls it apart and Shakthivel starts to rebuild it to the correct proportion. This is an indication that there are very strict rules around the representation of the statues and any deviation, however slight, is not tolerated.

Day 6

We arrive to see the preparations for the ceremony of the death anniversary of Palinasamy's mother who died in childbirth 20 years before. Lakshmi and Sundarambal have already purified the house by covering the walls, floors, kitchen and stove areas with a fresh wash of liquid cow manure and water (this has disinfectant qualities). Palinasamy has gone to fetch the family priest whose job it is to perform birth, wedding and death ceremonies and to conduct the ritual.

Manikkam starts beating the neck, which is supported by a central wooden stick. Now Darmalingam helps him move the neck onto the body and they continue to match the two parts together by beating and smoothing with the paddles and burnishing tools.

Palinasamy returns with the priest and, while he prepares the ingredients for the *puja*, Palinasamy bathes himself outside, shaving and changing into a clean white *lunghi*. He has fasted all day in preparation for the *puja*. The priest chants mantras, performs various rituals and in return is given 1kg (2.2lbs) of rice, some vegetables and money. None of the other family members are involved – not even his father, who appears totally disinterested in the proceedings, despite the fact that it is his wife they are honouring. Lakshmi has to cook Palinasamy's lunch on a separate stove from the rest of the family and stores his food in a special earthenware vessel smeared with holy ash to mark it from the others.

Returning to the horse, Palinasamy and Manikkam begin to form the decorative bells with tiny pinch pots and start to build the chin, supporting it with sticks. Later, after Palinasamy has broken his fast, he adds more coils to the head and starts to make the reins. Shakthivel returns with another load of wood on his bicycle; the firing will require five loads which must be collected well in advance in order to dry it thoroughly. The two men continue to build the head and tie a rope from the beams in the roof around the horse's



Above: Manikkam completing details of bridle, reins and decorative bells etc.

Left: The neck has been fitted onto the body and Manikkam begins to make the head.



Shakthivel painting a statue of *Ayanaar* with his consorts *Purna* and *Puskala* using earth pigments.

bit to support it. Now they are polishing the surface with the tamarind tool.

I ask Palinasamy if he has ever sat upon a horse. He replies, 'I would be too scared – I'd fall off and break my bones and then wouldn't be able to make horses.' Invitations to demonstrate his art have enabled him to travel and see live horses but it is likely that many villagers would never have seen one in the flesh.

Day 7

Palinasamy and Manikkam continue building the head and adding details such as the tongue, teeth and eyes. They are worried that the mouth is too soft and the weight of the clay will pull the head off but *Ayanaar* looks on benignly and it remains intact. Palinasamy starts to make the ears separately by forming them flat on the ground and then adding coils to curve the edges and the tail is built up with enclosed coils. I ask if the horse is male or female – they answer with a laugh that it is always male. No one has ever seen such a big horse in this village and the villagers are continually appearing to watch the progress and give advice. Manikkam once made a life-size horse ten years ago, which was installed in a local temple, and it is obvious that he is enjoying demonstrating his mastery and skill.

Shakthivel returns with another load of wood and starts to paint some fired statues of *Ayanaar* and *Hanuman* the monkey god. First he covers the surface with a white clay dug from the site of a well excavation. He paints the details with a

brush made from the leaves of the *kattalai* plant, ochre taken from the well site, red iron from surface clay, black from charcoal and green from local tree leaves. The colours are ground by Sundarambal on the grinding stone used for grinding grains and spices for cooking. After the first monsoon all these colours will be washed away and the statues returned to their terracotta state, the colours significant only at the moment of offering.

In the early afternoon Manikkam and Palinasamy cover the head with a smooth slurry to fill in the depressions and even out the surface. Meanwhile Darmalingam is sitting silently beating the pots he threw yesterday – he has decided not to involve himself with the discussions around the horse today. During the first few days the making time was very short in proportion to the drying time but today they are working more or less constantly on the final details. Now Palinasamy puts the ears onto the head to check the proportions and by mid afternoon they have finished. The various parts are dismantled and allowed to dry slowly to avoid cracking. It will take seven or eight days to dry out completely.

Day 8

Lakshmi and Sundarambal have asked us to wear *saris* so that we can be photographed with the family in what they consider to be 'proper attire'. To their amusement we arrive today dressed in the traditional garment for married Hindu women. It feels extremely restrictive as here I am used to wearing *shalwar kameez* (loose shirt and baggy pyjama



The kiln, built by Palinasamy's ancestors is an open horseshoe shaped construction made of brick and stone walls which slope inwards. The entrance is at a higher level than the back where there is a stoking mouth. The floor of the kiln consists of moveable tubular props which support sherds under which the fuel is stoked.

trousers) – and my admiration increases for the graceful movements of *sari*-clad women engaged in heavy manual labour all over India. The horse is drying in the sun along with pots and other statues which will all be fired together; terracotta work is always fired during the day to avoid a sudden drop in temperature and the risk of cracking occurring.

The kiln was built by Palinasamy's ancestors and the family has used it for generations. It is an open horseshoe-shaped construction made of brick and stone walls about 48 cm. (19in) thick which slope inwards, the upper diameter being 75cm (29.5in.) wider than at ground level. It is built on a gradient so that the back forms the higher end – about 2.5m (8.5ft) high sloping down to a height of 1.35m (4.5ft) at the front. Halfway up around the outer wall, a wide 75cm (29.5in.) ledge has been built which follows the sloping line, rising upwards towards the back. The walls are covered with a layer of mud containing small pieces of sherd; this same mixture is used to repair the kiln after the rainy season. The opening at the front of the horseshoe is about 90cm (35in.) wide and there is a stoking mouth at the back about 1.05m (3.5ft) high and 43cm (17in.) wide. The floor of the kiln consists of moveable 30cm (12in.) high tubular props (of

fired clay) which support sherds under which fuel can be stoked from the back – the fire spreading underneath and up through the props.

Wood is the potter's most expensive resource throughout India and in this area it is cheaper to buy the stumps and roots of the palm tree than the upper trunk and branches. It is Shakthivel's job to excavate and cut them out of the ground. The four men in the family, plus two neighbours, put a rope under the horse and carry it to the kiln. Now Shakthivel fills a basket with wood and begins to pile it up outside the kiln – this firing will require five baskets full. Sherds are placed in front of the fire mouth at the back and wood is stacked around the horse. Lakshmi and Sundarambal are carrying pots and stoves to the kiln – these are placed at the back with the horse's legs, surrounded by wood and interspersed with sherds whose function is to support further layers. Next the head is carried in with some elephants, then the *Ayanaar* statue is arranged with more large pots which are always placed inverted. More wood is arranged in between and around the pieces, and lastly the whole pile is covered with sherds which will help to retain the heat.

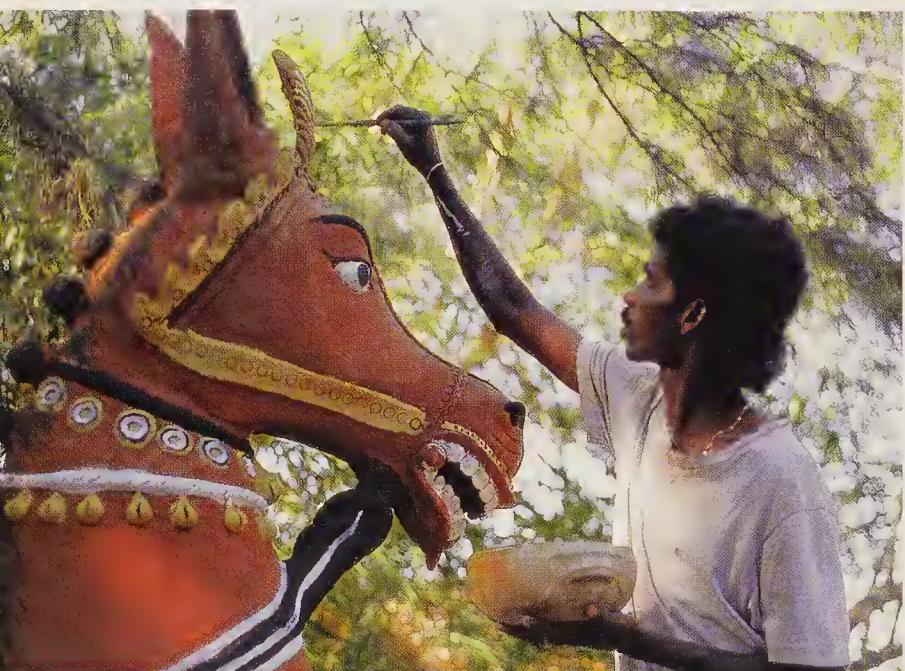
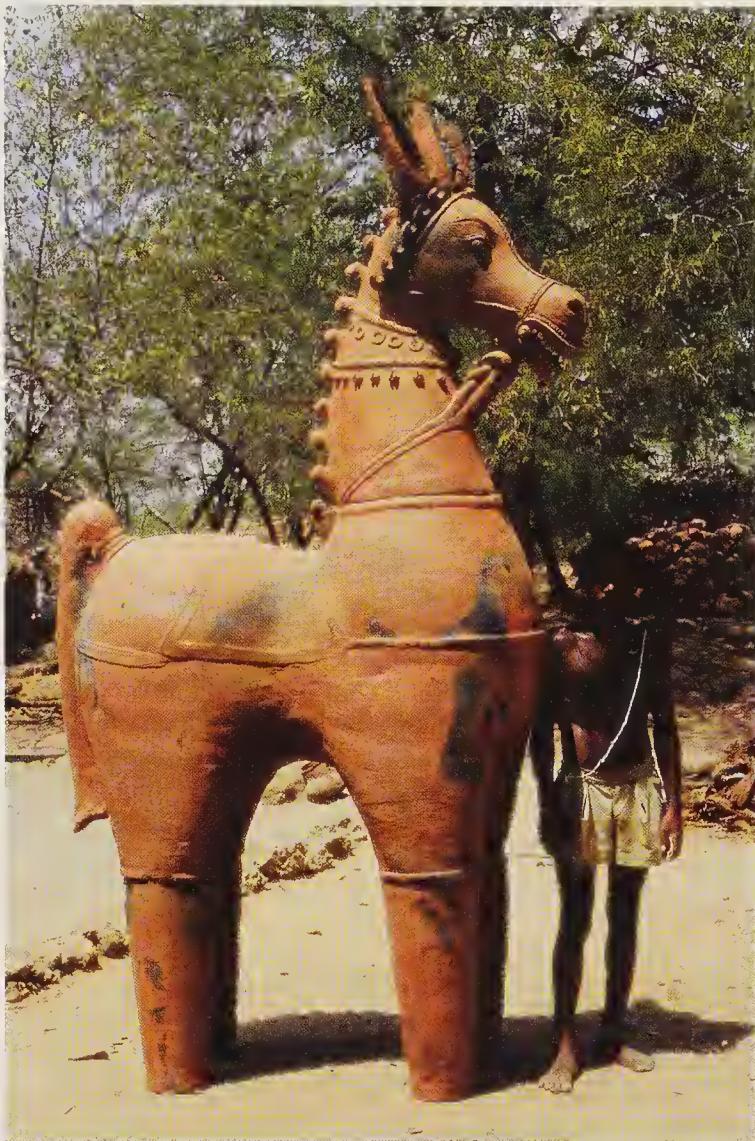


Top: The horse has been carried in by the family in sections. Wood is arranged around the horse interspersed with sherds which help to support the wood and allow heat to circulate. Pots are stacked, inverted, on top of the horse with more wood and sherds, then the pile covered with sherds.

Above: Shakthivel starts the firing by pushing ignited dry leaves and brushwood into the stoking hole at the back. Within minutes the wood has ignited inside the kiln.

I ask several times about the system for placing wood but they reply that there is no system, they just do it. However, the importance of the juxtaposition of the pots, statues, wood and sherds should not be underestimated – it is crucial to the success of the firing and the efficient use of the precious fuel. Over generations the knowledge and skill of how to balance these factors to perfection has been passed on. It has taken one hour to load and now Shakthivel puts some dried leaves and thorny brushwood into the firemouth at the back, ignites them and pushes them underneath the pile with a stick. He spends five minutes stoking with more of this material. Meanwhile Palinasamy is at the front of the kiln igniting the dried leaves and twigs and pushing them inside, taking great care to control the burning so that the heat builds up evenly. Within minutes the wood placed throughout the kiln has ignited and smoke is billowing into the sky.

Palinasamy walks around the ledge looking into the kiln; he can tell by the red colour which parts have reached the required temperature and which parts need more stoking. Some firewood is thrown onto an area which has not yet ignited. Now he takes a burning piece of wood held between two sherds and throws it into the back stoking hole, pushing it underneath with a stick. After half an hour the whole process is finished, reaching a temperature of about 700–800°C (1,292–1,472°F) depending on the hot/cool spots. The horse has taken seven days to make, seven days



Above: The horse is painted with earth pigments.

Above, left: Palinasamy standing beside the assembled horse. There was a crack in the belly which was mended with a mixture of ant hill clay and plant fibre.

Above, right: Palinasamy with his Ayanaar horse. Because the horse was commissioned commercially it cannot be installed in a shrine and is donated to Ray Meeker in his Pottery Workshop in Pondicherry where it will slowly become weathered with the passing of time.

to dry and 30 minutes to fire! Occasionally a large horse has to be made and fired *in situ* without a kiln but it is more risky as unforeseen wind can cause uneven firing and lead to cracking. There is greater control and a more even temperature inside the kiln. Four hours later I touch the sherds on the top of the kiln. They are completely cool but we will have to wait until tomorrow to unload it.

This morning I watched Palinasamy's neighbours loading and firing their kiln with 300 pots, representing one month's work from seven family members. The main potter there has two wives who are sisters. The firing proceeded in the same fashion as that described above, except that after fifteen minutes we started to hear explosions sounding like fireworks coming from the kiln. Every potter dreads this sound as it is the sound of pots exploding. When the kiln is opened the next day they have lost 50% and they think it is because the clay had insufficient sand in its mixture and so could not withstand the sudden thermal shock of the fire. This represents a catastrophic loss, and a risk factor which is always present in the life of a potter but rarely understood or appreciated by the public.

Day 9

Everyone, including the women and children, are helping to unpack the kiln. The horse is carried out by six men. There is a big crack under the belly which has to be mended before it can be assembled. The horse usually breaks in two and has to be repaired inside the kiln so we are lucky that it has remained in one piece; *Ayanaar* must be pleased with the commission. Shakthivel cycles off to collect some anthill clay (which has special binding properties) while Manikkam shreds the fibre of the *kattalai* plant. This fibre is pressed into the crack and covered with a mixture of anthill clay and millet grain which has been boiled in water to make a glue. It is

difficult to reach inside the horse, so a neighbour's small daughter is lifted inside and instructed on how to fill the crack. Some red iron clay is smoothed over the repair to camouflage it and after an hour to allow for drying it is ready to assemble.

Because the horse was commissioned commercially it cannot be installed in a shrine and is donated to Ray Meeker. Palinasamy will accompany it in a truck the 250km (155 mile) journey to Pondicherry and install it in the garden of Ray's Pottery Workshop where he will paint it with traditional colours and leave it to slowly become weathered by time.

It is typical of village hospitality that during the second day of our visit Palinasamy had said, 'You are my family now.' It is with great reluctance that I leave this family, hoping I shall be able to return one day.

The unique symbiotic relationship existing between potters and the worship of village gods is gradually changing at several different levels. Firstly the offering of cement figures and statues are becoming popular amongst villagers. Palinasamy himself would like to learn how to make cement horses. Most of the potters working actively for village temples in the traditional material of terracotta are old men. Their sons are either diverting their skills into the commercial market, like Palinasamy, or going into completely different areas of work.

The commercial market is dictated by urban taste and what will sell. Many of the purer traditional forms will gradually disappear and be replaced by over-embellished figures and animals with direct references to the commercial arts of advertising, cinema, television and comics. This kind of work can be seen in the Craft Emporia in major cities all over India and is exported globally. Meanwhile hundreds of shrines containing the original terracotta statues are gradually decomposing into oblivion.



Rajasthan

Rajasthan, one of India's most exotic and colourful states, is divided into the hilly rugged south-eastern region and the barren north-western Thar desert which extends across the border into Pakistan. With the Aryan invasion of the area the original inhabitants, the *Mina* and *Bhil* tribes, were pushed southwards into the rocky mountainous regions of the Aravallis where a camouflaged survival was easier. India has the largest Tribal population in the world, consisting of many culturally different groups, all descended from her original inhabitants. Over the centuries, the Hindu rituals of icon worship and offering of terracotta gifts have been incorporated into Tribal systems of worship.

Once a year during January, groups from the *Bhil*, *Gujari* and *Garijat* Tribes travel distances of up to several hundred kilometres, by bus and on foot, to the Rajasthan village of Molela. There they buy, from the potters, clay plaques depicting their gods in various anthropomorphic forms. Each group is accompanied by a priest (*bhopa*) who helps to choose the appropriate image of a particular god, and the potter is paid with cash, grain, a coconut and 1.25m (4.1ft) of cotton fabric (red cloth for a female deity and white for a male). The priest leads the procession from Molela to the nearby river Banas where the deity is worshipped before returning home for installation in the shrine amidst feasting, ceremonies and prayers. For these villagers the worship of their terracotta deities is as fundamental and necessary to survival as the water pitcher which contains and carries water from the well to their homes in this dry land.

Shrines can be found everywhere in rural India: in small dark caves, in the middle of dense forests, on high hill tops, in the roots of gigantic trees, in open fields, by the wayside or in the village square, at the threshold of a home and even within the living space or courtyard of a family. Komal Kothari describes the function of the village shrine in *Gods of the Byways*:



A veritable network of shrines holds the fabric of rural society together, for the shrine may be said to be an expression of the social needs of the rural people. It has a function to perform in the life-cycle from childbirth and marriage ceremonies, to the ritual of death. It has an important role to play in incidents of illness or accident, in fear from unknown sources, in the desire for supernatural protection. It has a role in family quarrels, land disputes, marital differences, infertility or mental ailments. The people look to the shrine to solve such problems and to provide both practical and spiritual aid. It is their court of justice, their hospital and mental home, their guidance clinic as well as the focus of their faith. It provides the link between this life and the next; between the known, natural world and the unknown supernatural ways'.

Opposite: Terracotta painted plaque by Mohan Lal depicting the deities *Kala Bhairav* and *Gora Bhairav*: the dark and the fair. *Kala*, cunning and strong willed is propitiated by the offering of liquor and animal sacrifice, while *Gora*, mild, compassionate and vulnerable, is offered sweetmeats.



Mohan Lal with his wife Navli on his left, daughter in law Kailash and his two sons (from left to right) Dinesh and Rajendra from Molela, Rajasthan.

Molela is a small town 40km (25 miles) north of Udaipur, close to the Banas river. Corn, wheat, lentils and chillies are grown and flocks of peacocks can be seen pecking at the ground. One can see the foothills of the Aravalli mountains from these fields. There are about 40 potter families living here, making an assortment of votive plaques and domestic vessels; although the demand for water and cooking pots is decreasing, the practice of the Tribals to regularly replace their icons provides a constant market for the potter. An important symbiotic relationship exists between the two.

I am able to spend ten days in January with a family of potters, recording the making and firing of terracotta icons and visiting local shrines and temples. The potter, Mohan Lal, a shrewd wiry man in his 60s lives with his wife, two sons, their wives and grandson on the edge of Molela. They live in a *pukka* house (made of cement) surrounded by a high wall enclosing a large courtyard. The house is built on two levels: living rooms upstairs and working rooms downstairs, opening onto the courtyard area which contains the kiln and a covered area for the buffalo and goats. Its size displays his success and status within the potter community; he and his father before him have both won National Awards for Master Craftsmen, enabling them to travel abroad, demonstrating their techniques and representing India to the West. This has led to commissions for plaques in hotels, restaurants

and private houses, requiring much larger panels than those made for their Tribal clientele and depicting scenes of modern as well as rural life.

The time spent here marks the commencement of my research. Beginnings and ends are often memorable, and we arrive in the semi-darkness of an auspicious full-moon night; we have arranged to live and sleep with the family, as the nearest hotel is two hours' drive away. I am quite nervous and they must be too. I am travelling with two women friends, one of whom is acting as interpreter, and we are initially given the room of Rajender, one of the married sons. He indicates by the four mattresses on the floor that he will be sleeping with us for our protection. The family are very anxious about robbers, despite the enormous iron chains and bolts across the wooden door and the iron gates at the entrance to the courtyard which are closed each night.

Day 1

Living with the family gives me an insight into their cycle of life and work. We wake at dawn to hear Kailash, the wife of the eldest son, starting the fire under the mud stove to prepare tea for the family. She adopts the strict custom of covering her head and face with her veil in the presence of any older man, including her husband. She has learnt from a young age to be constantly alert until the habit has become



Terracotta painted plaque by Mohan Lal depicting the deity *Dev Narayan* who is represented mounted on a horse with a sword in his hand. Images of deities depicted in various incarnations and local heroes from folk legends are widely worshipped by the Tribals.

unconscious. Rajender's wife has recently had a baby and is staying with her parents (it is the custom for women to return to their family home at the time of confinement) so the main responsibilities of household duties, feeding the animals, helping with pottery making, as well as looking after the baby, rest with Kailash.

The family use two sources of clay from local ponds, a coarse one for making the plaques and a plastic one for throwing. Donkey dung is collected by the women from the fields and added to the coarse clay in the ratio of 1:3 to make it suitable for modelling. As with all potter families, there are strict divisions of labour within its members and today it is Kailash's job to beat the dry donkey dung into a fine powder, using a large wooden beater. She is creating clouds of dust and tries to cover her face with her *sari* to avoid inhaling too much. Ruckaba, an old man, is employed here to help with the plaque production and he sieves the dung and mixes it with the dry clay before adding water and wedging it with his feet. This is a busy time and they make new batches of clay every couple of days.

Below: A water wheel in the district of Molela pulled by oxen. The clay pots are filled with water from a deep well and emptied into a trough which will feed a ditch to irrigate the fields for crop cultivation.



Everywhere I look there are plaques in various stages of production: some already fired and stacked up against the walls of the courtyard ready for painting, some lying flat in rows drying out before firing, and some half completed. These images of male and female deities represented in the forms of snakes and local heroes from folk legends reflect a lineage stretching back over four millennia. The mother goddess from Harappa and the clay images of the Gupta period are still formed today using similar techniques to those used to create the elaborate terracotta decoration of Gupta temples.



Terracotta images of the mother goddess depicted in various incarnations are widely worshipped by the Tribals. As *Durga* she sits astride a lion, as *Chamunda* an elephant, mounted on a buffalo as *Kalika* or holding a sword as *Aawanmata*. The serpent god *Nagadev* has been worshipped in India since ancient times and the images usually have a central figure flanked with several snake consorts. Another popular male deity the potters make is *Bhairav* represented by two images indicating the deity's omnipotence – *Kala Bhairav*, and *Gora Bhairav*, the dark and the fair. *Bhairav*, who bears a distinct resemblance to the god *Shiva*, holds a trident, a thunderbolt, a skull and a noose. His mount is a dog and his image is installed in every shrine with that of other gods and goddesses. *Kala*, cunning and strong willed, is propitiated by the offering of liquor and animal sacrifice while *Gora*, mild, compassionate and vulnerable, is offered sweetmeats.

Dinesh, Mohun Lal's older son and husband to Kailash, begins to model a plaque to illustrate the story of *Durga* making the demons dance to music before slaying them. Mounted on a lion, she holds a drum, a weapon to kill demons, a cup from which to drink the blood of demons,

Left: Dinesh beginning to make the lion from flattened clay.

Below: By combining squeezing, pinching and coiling actions Dinesh begins to build up and refine the lion and deity figures using his fingers and hands.



and a sword. He starts by flattening the soft clay into a slab with a stone and evens it out by smoothing with water and a flat piece of wood. After removing impurities from the clay, he starts to cut the slab into the plaque shape which will form the surface to support the relief figures. Now he forms the lion and *Durga* from another piece of flattened clay, joining the crude shapes onto the plaque surface. By combining squeezing, pinching and coiling actions he begins to build up and refine the lion and deity figures, using his fingers and hands. From time to time he has to allow drying periods to avoid collapse, and he shows us the elephants and horses which the family also make to sell at fairs. Mohun Lal had thrown some cylinders and barrel shapes earlier today which Dinesh proceeds to cut and assemble, joining the parts together with water and soft clay.

Later we watch him adding the details to, and embellishing the *Durga* plaque with thin coils of clay. He can make three of these plaques a day working 9am to 6pm, and with the help of the old man Ruckaba they can produce 100 a month. However, the income from the pottery production is sporadic and during the lean months it is insufficient. The family own some land and grow wheat, corn, lentils and chillies which helps to supplement lack of sales.

Day 2

The studio floor is covered with plaques and Ruckaba is already squatting, working on a series of images depicting *Nagadev*, the snake god. Ruckaba wears a thick blanket wrapped around his shoulders like a shawl; during the day the skies are brilliant blue and the air clear, which means the nights and early mornings are very cold.

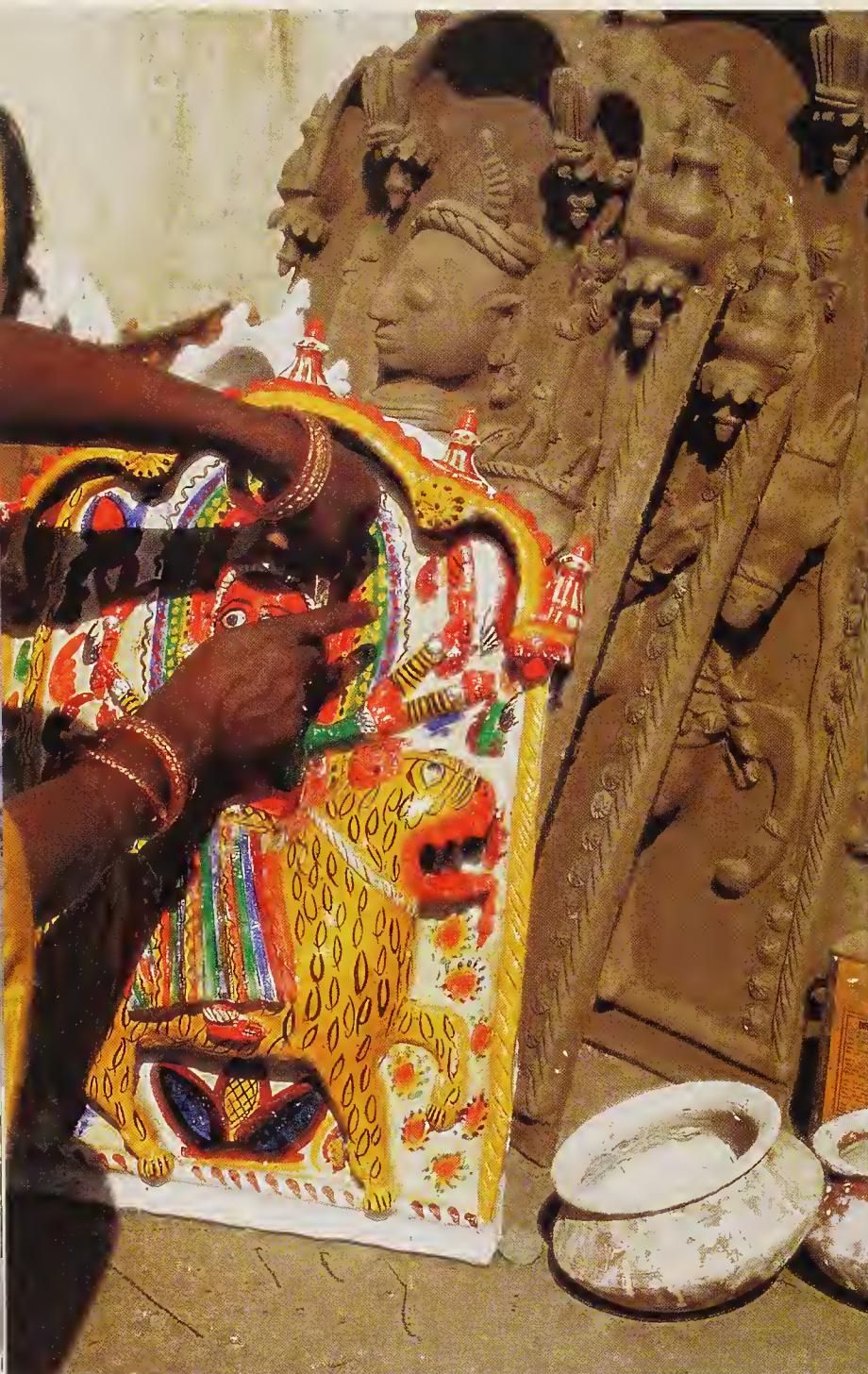
Dinesh is continuing to make plaques representing *Dev Narayan* – another important primary god worshipped by the *Gujari* tribes who is represented mounted on a horse with a sword in his hand. As he works, I ask questions about their lives and he relates the amusing history of his arranged marriage. He was engaged at the age of nine to a girl of eight but at puberty she grew taller than him so the engagement was broken off. At 13 he was engaged to a girl of ten who did not grow at all, so that was also broken off. Kailash was the third attempt when he was 18. His parents initially went to 'view' her but when he saw her he was not keen to accept; he was pressurised by his parents and reluctantly got married. It turned out that she also had been engaged before but her fiancé had murdered someone and was sent to prison. The marriage market in India is a fascinating area of study and provides insight into every aspect of Indian culture including religious, artistic, economic and political.

Although Dinesh and his brother Rajender have learnt the skills of pottery making from their father and ancestors before them, they would prefer a 'white collar' job with the

government, but so far have been unsuccessful in their applications. This is a difficult period of transition for the sons of traditional potters. With a decreasing demand for earthenware domestic utensils and the influence of urban culture they no longer accept the limitations of their hereditary low-caste occupation, and want to fulfil ambitions of higher status work. For this reason, Dinesh and Rajender could be described as reluctant potters.



The completed plaque of *Durga* making the demons dance to music before slaying them. Mounted on a lion, she holds a drum, a weapon to kill the demons, a cup from which to drink their blood, and a sword.



After firing the plaques are painted with a mixture of white clay and glue which will form the background to the painted bright commercial colours. A coat of lacquer seals the paint and Navli adds small pieces of silver paper to further embellish the deity and his mount.

Day 3

Today Mohan Lal's wife Navli is preparing the fired plaques for decoration. She is squatting in the courtyard wearing a brilliant yellow *sari* and displaying the traditional thick silver bracelets and anklets worn by Rajasthani women – each anklet weighing 0.75kg (1.66lbs) She prepares the surface by applying a mixture of white stone powder and

glue with a cloth and Dinesh arranges the seven colours which have been traditionally used for generations: blue, yellow, green, orange, red, peach and black; originally these would have been made from natural pigments but now some are bought commercially. He applies blocks of colour and adds the linear details with black carbon taken from the underside of their cooking pots.

The arid semi-desert landscapes here provide a backdrop of muted hues and it is said that from this austerity Rajasthan almost invents its palette of vibrant colour. Wherever one looks there are moving dots of every conceivable colour in the form of coloured turbans as the men go about their business. These colours are mirrored in the *saris* and embroidered skirts worn by women and also the paintings depicting religious scenes and decorative motifs on the outside walls of houses. It is easy to see the connection with the dazzling colours of Dinesh's palette.

Now the decorated plaques are propped up against the wall to warm in the midday sun while Dinesh prepares the lacquer made from a mixture of plant gum and seed oil which he applies with his fingers to control the consistency. Navli fetches a wooden box containing sheets of silver paper and further embellishes the plaques by adding small pieces of silver to the lacquered surface in prominent places. They are now ready for sale.

Day 4

Today a firing has been planned which will begin late in the afternoon. We decide to take a walk around the village to see what the main potting community is doing. As we pass the bus shelter we see a group of Tribal men with their painted icons which they will be taking back to their village on the bus. We are told that there is fierce competition between the potters at this time of year to secure sales, and they often wait at the bus stop to 'catch' arriving customers. As we approach the area where the potters live, we come across the beginning of an open firing. Four large container vessels are being placed in the middle of the road outside a temple and represent the centre of the pile.

Plaques are being stacked up on bricks around the central vessels by two old men who complain that they have no sons to help them. Their daughters have moved away to other potter families and the situation clearly shows how the tradition of sons remaining in the parental home equals economic security in old age. Now a ring of fired pots used for the water wheel are placed around the circumference, their pointed bottoms pushed into the sandy ground. The gaps in between them will become the stoking passages. One of the plaques falls over and breaks, a reminder of the constant diligence and care required to pack the fragile unfired clay. Now neighbours and children help to cover

the pile with sherds. It is dusk and Ruckaba appears, his day's work for Mohan Lal finished; he goes into the temple and starts playing the drums, summoning people to come and worship.

Broken pieces of dried cowdung are placed around the outer edge of the pile and one of the old men carries some burning embers over to light it. Despite the inherent competition for customers and sales there is an element of communal spirit and mutual support here. In contrast Mohan Lal has isolated himself to the outside of the village to guard the knowledge he has gained from commercial success and exposure to new techniques. During the next few hours wood is stoked further and further into the centre until the whole pile begins to glow red in the blackness of night. After four hours the old men are satisfied with the colour – it has reached required temperature and any pieces of burning wood are retrieved and quenched with water to be used again.

Traditionally the potters in this area fire in the open. Because Mohan Lal has had contact with other potters during his travels he has learnt that a kiln can increase fuel efficiency and he has been using a simple cylindrical container built from brick with four fireboxes for the last six years. An opening on one side serves as a door which can be bricked up and dismantled for packing and unloading. Its height is versatile and it can be built higher with more bricks depending on how much work he has to fire. The fuel is a mixture of sawdust from the local sawmill and wood bought from the Tribals who collect it from the forests.

Mohan Lal is supervising Dinesh and Rajender packing the plaques vertically in a neat line across the middle of the kiln, with sherds in between and at the sides where they meet the brick wall. The sherds will support the plaques and keep them stable as well as allowing hot air to circulate during the firing. Larger spaces are filled with elephants and other small items, and then the top covered with inverted sherds. As well as clay preparation Kailash also assists with carrying work to the kiln and back, starting the fire and stoking. At 3.30 pm she starts a fire with a mixture of straw and cowdung cakes which she pushes into the fireboxes to pre-heat the plaques while Rajender begins to brick up the opening.

It is usual for the whole family to be involved in the firing and Navli and Kailash begin to stack piles of sawdust and wood outside the fireboxes. Within minutes, smoke appears through the top and the sherds become warm to the touch. The pre-heating continues for about 30 minutes and at 4.30 pm Rajender starts throwing handfuls of sawdust into the stoking holes. For the next six hours the two brothers must continually stoke with sawdust and wood, gradually feeding larger pieces into the fireboxes and pushing the sawdust into the middle of the kiln with a steel rod. At 10pm they intensify the stoking until flames and sparks are bursting

An open firing is begun in the middle of a street in Molela with four large urns. The plaques are stacked up around the urns, vertically propped up on bricks to allow the heat to circulate underneath.





Above: A ring of fired pots used for the water wheel is placed around the circumference of the pile. The gaps in between will become the stoking passages for wood. The pile will be covered with sherds and fired at night so that the temperature can easily be gauged by the colour of the glow.

Left: Rajendra packing modelled animal heads around the vertically stacked plaques in a cylindrical kiln made from bricks. They will be covered with sherds and fired with sawdust and wood stoked through four stoking channels.

through the top and it begins to glow a dull red, reaching a temperature of around 800°C (1472°F). They extract the embers and sprinkle them with water to make charcoal which will be sold to local tea stall holders – nothing is ever wasted here.

Day 5

We return to the village to visit the brother of Mohan Lal. As we arrive at his house we meet a group of Tribal men who have travelled 200km (124 miles) from a village called Dhingavri, in the Kotra area on the border of Gujarat, led by Kala Bhopa their priest. (*Bhopa* means the priest of the tribal community and *Kala* is black.) He tells us that it is customary to change the idols every three to five years and he has come today to purchase new idols because he is content and happy – a kind of ‘thank you’ to the deity.



They lead us onto the roof terrace to show us the ten plaques they have bought; seven depicting the deity *Dev Narayan*, then a *Durga*, a *Kalagora* and a *Bhoona Mendu* deity. They had arrived yesterday afternoon and ordered their plaques from the potter. While he painted and embellished them they were offered a meal and sleeping space on the terrace as part of the exchange. At the point of exchange they will crack a coconut, sprinkle holy water on the idols and light some incense before returning home on the bus, to install them in the shrine in the centre of their village. Once installed, they will sit in a row and be worshipped by Kala Bhopa's family on festival days.

There is a temple at the top of the hill outside the village. Most days we see a procession of brightly coloured moving *saris* and turbans slowly climbing the several thousand steps to the top. Today is Sunday and Rajender takes us to the 5.30 pm *puja* so that we can see the plaques *in situ*. Climbing the steps is a kind of penance in itself, but as we gain height a sense of spiritual uplifting begins to grow as the surrounding landscape of cultivated fields and hills reveals itself in the soft evening light. We reach the top to find a group of priests squatting in a circle, brewing coffee over an old tin of burning charcoal. While we drink coffee with them they

A *bhopa* (priest) conducting *puja* in front of *Polajji*, a protective deity symbolised by the central rectangular tablet. On either side are painted terracotta plaques offered to the god.

retrieve balls of *prasad* (a sweet offering consisting of a mixture of wheat flour, ghee and unrefined sugar) which has been baking in the embers of the fire. This will be offered to the deity and then distributed amongst the crowd at the end of the *puja*.

Now two priests enter the area where the icons are propped against the wall in a row. One of them goes into a trance to symbolise that the deity has entered him – in this region this is often followed by self-flagellation with a spiked stick. Now the *bhopa* can listen to the devotees' questions and problems and in this state of trance can give them answers directly from god. There are about 50 women and children crowding and jostling around the entrance, queuing to receive a blessing from the priest in exchange for some grain or coins. When the last woman has prostrated herself before the deity a group of musicians begin to play drums and wind instruments and the holy *prasad* is passed around for us all to eat.



A forest shrine where an elephant has been offered to the goddess *Bhairam Devi* at harvest time. The clay lamp was lit at the time of offering to draw the attention of the goddess and symbolically carry the devotees' prayers to heaven.

Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh is India's largest state, situated at the geographical centre of the country on a high plateau covered with mountains, deep ravines and vast unexplored forests. The borders of Madhya Pradesh touch seven other states: Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Within these borders live India's largest Tribal population consisting of 46 tribes who represent 27% of the state's inhabitants. The diversity of group identities results in an enormous variety of cultures and traditional craft styles, and because many areas share a border with another province, their crafts also reflect the influence of the neighbouring state.

Research for Madhya Pradesh took place primarily at the Tribal Museum in Bhopal (the capital) where I found powerful examples of both the votive animals from the Bastar region in the far south and clay relief decoration and wall painting from the north eastern Sarguja area. It was decided to concentrate on these two regions. The journey from Gujarat west to Sarguja was memorable, driving for one terrifying day in a car without brakes. This was followed by a long train journey sitting opposite the toilet in a crowded second-class railway carriage, constantly worrying about the safety of the camera equipment and resisting sleep to remain vigilant (Indian railway journeys are notorious occasions for theft). In contrast the journey from Sarguja south to Bastar through deciduous jungle, with frequent stops at roadside shrines to look at the terracotta, was a reward for the penance suffered earlier.

KONDAGAON

Kondagaon is an important market town in the Bastar region, surrounded by a flat landscape predominantly used for rice cultivation. The area is inhabited by Tribals from the *Muria*, *Maria*, *Bhatara*, *Dhurwa*, *Dorla* and *Parja* tribes, who for generations have lived in symbiosis with the makers of their everyday domestic earthenware and votive terracotta. Potters supply them with pots and animal figures to fulfil their most important requirements for everyday existence, from the momentous events of birth, marriage and death to the threat of disease or the celebration for a cure. At all these times



an offering of either a vessel or terracotta animal is made to the appropriate god. These include elephants, tigers, bullocks, monkeys and horses as well as lamps and incense burners.

4km (2.5 miles) from Kondagaon, close to the river Nala is a village called Masora. A thriving potter community of 72 families live here side by side with their Tribal neighbours on the edge of the jungle. Although the two communities have different customs and rituals many aspects of their lives cross over, including the sharing of deities and forms of worship. Housing in Masora is constructed from mud with tiled roofs, the garden or yard areas defined by lines of distinctive thick wooden staves of the indigenous *sarai* tree felled from the jungle. Masora does not resemble a conventional Indian village as there are large open spaces between the houses where livestock graze alongside chickens and Muscovy ducks. The grassy fields are edged with bamboo and a variety of trees including *moha* (from which liquor is made), and fruit-bearing trees such as banana, papaya and *char*.



A *Pujari* (potter priest) performing *puja* at a village shrine to the goddess *Boori Mata* represented by the central stone. The elephant was offered a few months before during the September *Pola* festival for rice harvest. Clay vessels are traditionally used during *puja* ceremonies together with the clay lamp.

The village has no electricity and water has to be collected from a communal bore well. Most of the potters here own some land and subsidise their low incomes by growing rice, vegetables, and by practising husbandry.

Originally the highly embellished pottery elephants, a speciality of the area, were made solely by one family, but an N.G.O. (Non-Government Organisation) funded Pottery Centre built nine years ago set up training programmes to improve the skills and markets of the potters' community here. The situation today illustrates well how the transition between old and new markets breaks down traditional relationships between maker and buyer. Where once all the figurative work was made for worship, now a substantial proportion is being sold to urban middle-class consumers through the state emporia. Because the centre pays prices which the original tribal customers cannot afford, there is a reduction in demand for the largest elephants which were once bought regularly.

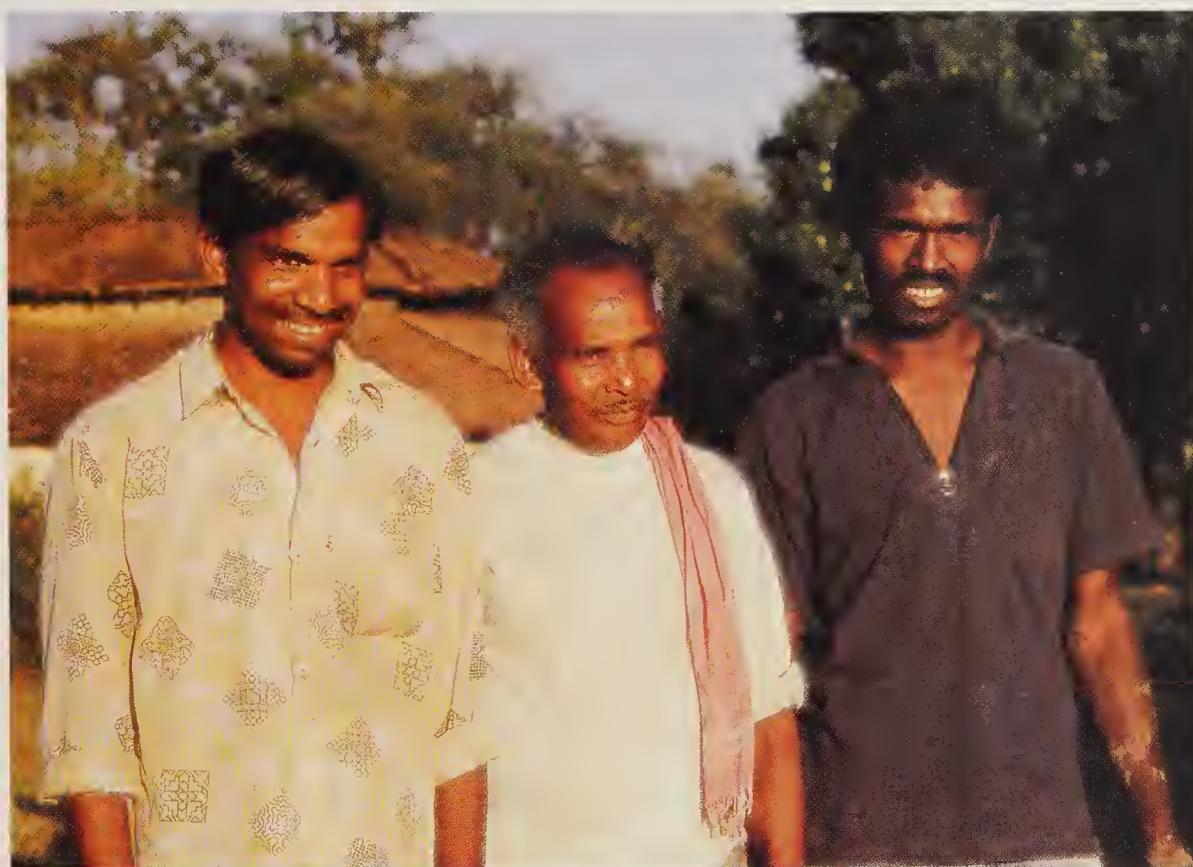
We make contact with Sahadev Rana, a potter in his 40s whose modelling skills are highly regarded. It is known that

Tribals will walk many miles to buy one of his elephants in order to present their deity with the most beautiful statue they can procure. The monumental Indian elephant has been used as a symbol of power and grandeur throughout Asian history and its significance is illustrated by the local Tribal myth about the origins of pottery making:

A herd of elephants, while sporting in the river waters, stuck some clay on their foreheads, which after drying fell off on the jungle path. These odd looking dried pieces of clay fascinated primitive humans and they kept them in their huts of straw and sticks. Accidentally, the huts caught fire and were razed to the ground. The people were amazed to see that the clay pieces remained intact and in fact became firmer and stronger by the firing process. The pieces withstood the onslaught of the rain as well. Jubilant over the discovery, humans learned the process of baking and firing.

(from *Tribal Arts and Crafts of Madhya Pradesh*)

Just as the style of the votive horse changes from region to region, so the representation of the elephant takes on many



From left to right: Sahadev Rana, Shankar Ram Rana and Bansi Lal from Masora, Bastar region.

diverse forms throughout India. The basic techniques of vessel making are adapted so that the body and head might be thrown as a basic pot form, the legs as cylinders and the ears cut from a dish form. Each area produces a specific style which is immediately recognisable. Elephants in the northern Sarguja area of Madhya Pradesh, in contrast to their highly decorated Bastar cousins, are simple forms and used by the Tribals on the occasion of marriage. The potter, by way of payment, is presented with rice equivalent to the hollow cavities of the thrown head, body and legs, so there is an irresistible tendency to make them as large and full-bellied as possible.

Many Indian deities are associated with natural phenomena such as rivers, mountains, rocks, trees, the sun, planets and animals, as well as the elements of fire, earth, water and air which are all worshipped as specific gods and goddesses. Sahadev, accompanied by his nephew Bansi Lal, shows us some local shrines in the jungle where elephants have been offered by villagers to the goddess *Bhairam Devi* at the time of harvest. Under the *surai* trees and partly camouflaged by jungle growth is a stone representing the deity, a few lamps (lit in order to draw her attention and symbolically carry the devotees' prayers to heaven) and the offered elephant which is embellished with garlands of small clay bells. For the duration of the ceremony the spirit of *Bhairam Devi* entered the elephant, giving blessings to the devotee, and after the ritual the sculpture was left to crumble. Now the elephant is already partially disintegrating into the

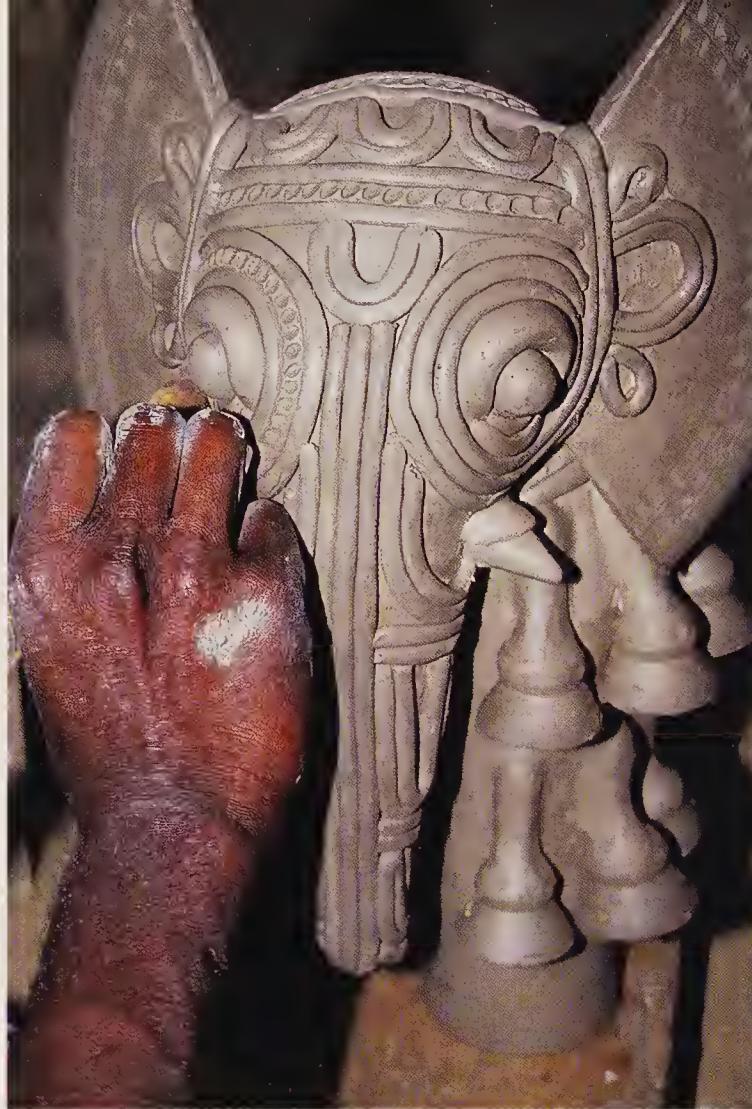


Strict divisions of labour are followed by Indian potters. Here in Masora, the women collect clay from a river 2kms (1.24 miles) away twice daily and carry about 15kgs (33lbs) back on their heads. This woman has embedded her shovel into the clay.



Above: Bansi Lal attaching the thrown bells to embellish the elephant.

Right: Bansi Lal decorating his elephant; the monumental Indian elephant has been used as a symbol of power and grandeur throughout Asian history. Tribals will walk many miles undeterred by distance to buy an elephant such as this in order to present their deity with the most beautiful statue they can procure.



jungle floor, its legs covered with a fine layer of earth splashed up during the monsoon rains. It symbolises the continual process of creation, destruction and re-creation at the very core of the Hindu belief system.

Whereas most potters keep a permanent stock of domestic vessels for sale, the votive work is made to order. We ask Sahadev if we can commission examples of the range of animals offered in this region, which we will donate to the village shrines. It is agreed that Bansi Lal, a local potter, will start with an elephant. Elephants can be offered at any time of the year at personal shrines and also during the rice festival – *Pola*. A large 1.20m (4ft) high elephant is offered by the whole village during collective community worship to the mother goddess *Mata Devi* at harvest time, when all the villagers will assemble amongst music, festivity and general rejoicing.

Bansi Lal has no prepared clay, having just returned from Delhi where he has been demonstrating and selling work from the Centre for two months. He will work in the studio of an uncle who is in full production making vessels. Clay is excavated from the local river bank and soaked with river water at the site for two days. The women take care of transportation, making an excursion twice a day to collect about 15kg (33lbs) of clay, assisting each other to balance the load on their heads before walking 2km (1.24 miles) back to the village. Two parts clay are mixed with one part sand,

which is also collected locally; at the moment these raw materials are free but there is an air of resignation amongst potters here that the situation could change in the future. Bansi Lal uses a wooden spoked wheel resting on a wooden pivot which he turns by hand, throwing the component parts off the hump, starting with the body, legs, trunk, head and ears and finishing with the tiny bells which will embellish the elephant. Sahadev is watching the progress, overseeing his nephew who asks advice from time to time, checking he is using the correct proportions and number of bells. The thrown pieces are moved into the sun and once they have dried sufficiently he begins to assemble them, positioning the bulbous shaped body onto the four cylinder legs. He attaches them with coils of clay rolled on the mud floor, gradually closing the gaps between the legs and belly.

Now he puts his hand inside the elephant and by pinching the clay gives it a fuller body shape. The smaller pot representing the head is placed against the opening and joined with coils followed by the trunk, (a cone which has been slightly bent to make a curved form) attached in a similar way. A flattened wooden stick (his only tool) is used to smooth over the surface before he starts to add the bells, smoothing each one with his fingers. The decoration of the elephant with finely rolled coils is the most labour intensive of the processes involved and Bansi Lal starts at the back, building up a dense linear pattern.

It is a moving and profound experience to watch an Indian potter create a votive terracotta; Bansi Lal knows that his elephant is not just a common clay animal but a sacred living form and he works with loving devotion, aware of his responsibility and role in providing the means for communication between devotee and deity. Watching Bansi Lal, it is easy to see why potters are known as *Prajapati* – Lord of the People, and *Visvakarma* – Creator of the World. The poet Kabir says:

*One pot, one potter, and one who is the creator of the universe
one wheel which has created all sculptures
and one point in the centre where the core dwells.*

Now he cuts the dish shape in half to form the ears, flattening each side slightly and impressing the edges with his finger tips to make a pattern. Holes are cut into the head, then the ears inserted and further shaped and smoothed with the wooden tool.

During the research for this book we have hired many taxis and drivers who are initially sceptical and aloof about entering the potters' community, considering their status as a driver to be superior. After a day or so they usually become curious and leave the security of the car to investigate what we are doing. Often, after a few days they become fascinated by the processes, to the extent of becoming involved with the family and even assisting with kiln loading and firing. Today is no exception and our driver, intrigued by the creation of the elephant which he has been watching closely for several days points out a crack which has appeared in the trunk and needs to be filled.

Neighbouring potters have come into the workshop, curious about us and providing us with an opportunity to find out about their community. A particularly ravaged looking man with a line of vermillion (the primary colour associated with deities and their worship) painted vertically down his forehead is a *Sirha* (one who becomes possessed). He has inherited the responsibility to enter a trance and become possessed by the deity in order to act as medium and direct spokesman for the god or goddess. There might be fixed days or times when the *Sirha* is present at the shrine to pronounce judgement or give advice concerning such problems as illness, agricultural failure, property disputes, matrimonial troubles, infertility, witchcraft or affliction by ghosts. He plays an important role in the spiritual welfare of the villagers and has considerable power and influence over them. He tells us about the various deities worshipped here and which animals are offered.

The goddesses *Dhante Sara Devi* and *Mauli Devi* are offered the tiger to prevent illness and avoid misfortune and trouble. *Bhora Devi* is a form of *Shiva* and is offered the bullock in the spring before the seed is sown and later before the harvest. *Pendra Oodin Devi* is asked for general blessings

and given the monkey. *Rao Dev* is the protector of village boundaries and is offered the horse, also worshipped during the sowing and harvesting seasons. *Hing La Gin mata Devi* is given the incense container – *dhoop* and the lamp – *dias*, for general blessings, also during sowing and harvesting. The village worships *Bhima Dev* collectively if the monsoon is late by applying large quantities of liquid cowdung to the shrine, accompanied by music and singing. Clay lamps will be lit but no terracotta offered on this occasion.

The elephant is finished and we discuss another votive form, the tiger, once indigenous to the jungle around Masora. Sahadev tells us how 20 years ago a tiger became a source of constant harassment to the village and killed his bullock which was tethered at the edge of the jungle. He built a watchtower about 6m (19ft) from the dead animal and spent the night there; when the tiger returned for its kill he shot it with one shot from his shotgun. It is obvious that everyone has heard this story many times before. Now there are no tigers; the wild animals which roamed the jungle here, such as deer, monkeys, elephants and pigs, have become rare and the younger potters such as Bansi Lal must gather inspiration for their work by observing tigers at the zoo in Indore. Bansi Lal is making the tiger by assembling thrown parts using a similar technique to that of the elephant, cutting the front cylinder legs higher than the back to give the animal a thrusting, powerful posture. The tiger is ready for action with its mouth open and teeth bared. He spends a lot of time modelling the details and smoothing the surface to a perfect finish.

The Hindu calendar is filled with festivals and holy days, a reminder to the villager to express his or her devotion through ritual and offerings in order to maintain favour with the gods. The demand for particular clay items often coincides with a festival and *Nava Khani* is celebrated in September when the first grains of rice begin to ripen. At this time there is a huge demand in the area to buy a symbolic set of miniature kitchen equipment (dolls' size) to include cooking pots with lids, pots for *dhal*, rice and water, a grinding wheel, a *chula* (stove) plus a terracotta monkey and ox. Each potter makes around 130 sets and, in order to complete such vast quantities, they have evolved a shared mass production system.

Eight members of an extended family will work together, moving as a group from one house to another. Each individual will complete 130 of one of the items which are then left behind at that potter's house before the group moves onto the next. At the end of the session each potter has the vast number of completed sets but has been able to reduce his production time by restricting himself to the making of one item. On the day of the festival the first grains of rice will be ground and mixed with milk and molasses and offered to the Mother Goddess at the family shrine. The



Bansi Lal modelling the tiger's head – it is ready for action with mouth open and teeth bared. Tigers are offered to the goddesses *Dhante Sara Devi* and *Mauli Devi* to prevent illness and avoid misfortune and trouble.

terracotta monkeys and oxen will be anointed with the mixture and also offered. After the ceremony they will be attached to wheels and given string reins so that the children can pull them along as toys. There is a gender separation in the choice of animal – a boy will play with the ox and a girl with the monkey.

The festival of *Diwali* in November is the Hindu New Year, known as the Festival of Lights and celebrated throughout India. Clay lamps are lit at night in order to guide the legendary religious hero *Ram* home from his period of exile. Potters everywhere make hundreds of clay lamps which will be sold in the markets. Here in Masora the potters make a large oil lamp in which five wicks will be placed – *Karsa Kondhi* – this is placed over a waterpot containing some rice and worshipped by the women of the household. It is time for new beginnings; cooking vessels – *handi* – are bought to replace old cooking vessels, and the house cleaned and decorated with *rangoli* – patterns formed on the threshold and mud floor with rice powder.

Shivratri is the wedding day of *Shiva*, the Hindu god of destruction and creation, to *Parvati*, his bride. As the creator he is worshipped in the form of the lingum, which appears

in all *Shiva* temples. The form of the lingum is a column rounded at the top and resting on the yoni (a grooved tray-shaped base) with inherent symbolism of masculine/feminine. The potters in Masora make a cow with a human face *Kamdenu*, which they offer at their local *Shiva* temple on the river. It will be filled with milk and placed over the lingum so that it slowly drips onto the symbol of *Shiva*, cleansing and bathing him with a substance considered to be the most pure of all liquids. It is common for devotees to visit the *Shiva* temple with a little pot of milk in order to pour it over the Shivling.

While Bansi Lal is putting the finishing touches to the tiger we discover the significance of the Muscovy ducks. The identities of castes and tribes throughout India are expressed not only through choice of deity and adherence to specific rituals but also through dress, jewellery, housing and social codes of behaviour. Although here in Masora the Tribals and *Kumbhars* (potters) share many cultural aspects, there are also clearly defined areas which are separate and different. The *Kumbhars* in the Bastar region, unlike their Tribal neighbours, do not drink alcohol or eat chicken. The ducks are reared for meat and the chickens and eggs are sold or



Above left: This female monkey – *bendri* modelled by Shankar is offered to the personal deity of the home for the well being of the family. Later, wheels are attached and it is used as a toy by children.

Above right: Shankar modelling an oxen with great flourish within a few minutes. It is offered to *Bhora Dev* in the spring before the seed is sown and later before the harvest.

Right: Sahadev modelling a horse with rider offered to *Rao Dev*, the protector of village boundaries.

bartered. If a member of the community breaks this rule he will be prevented from participating in community events and ostracised, incurring a fine of 501 rupees (a considerable sum for a potter). If the law is broken a second time he will be fined 1,001 rupees, which has proved such a deterrent that in the last eight years only one or two people have broken the law. Although in some respects the village is backward in terms of amenities such as electricity and water, in other aspects their organisation of social discipline and justice is highly ordered and enviable in its effectiveness.

Sahadev's cousin, called Shankar Ram Rana is making pinched votive forms of a monkey, buffalo and ox which are all basically the same form with various modifications and modelled details to define their different characteristics. The female monkey *Bendri* is offered to the personal deity of the home and installed inside the house for the well being of the family. It can also be offered to the deities of the village at the local village shrine, along with the votive bullock. The ritual and sociological significance of the *Bendri* remains an enigma – in the closely neighbouring state of Orissa the terracotta *Hanuman* (popular Hindu monkey god) is offered, but here by a strange metamorphosis it has become a female monkey, often shown with a child. During the *Pola* festival the Tribals worship their agricultural implements,



including the plough, at the shrine of their village deity *Thakurdev*. Their bullocks will be fed the new grain and terracotta bullocks offered to the deity; these will be affixed with wheels after the ceremony and given to children as toys.

Shankar divides a lump of clay into a rough cross shape and bends it over so that the centre becomes the body of the monkey and the cross extensions become the legs. Now he stands it up on the mud floor and adds a ball of clay to one end, modelling it into a head with stylised features and topped with a basket of fruit which the monkey is carrying home from the market. A stick is wrapped in her tail and he refines the legs in the same way a Western potter would pull a handle – by pulling them outwards from the body with hands lubricated in water. Within several strokes the legs have lost their crude lumpy look and become smooth and even. He smoothes the rest of the body and head with his fingers; it is complete and has taken him eight minutes. The ox and buffalo are made in the same way. Each animal expresses great freshness and spontaneity of spirit and Shankar makes them with equal flourish.

We have spent five days here and although Sahadev has appeared regularly to oversee Bansi Lal's work and talk to us,

most of the time he has been busy with his regular production of cooking vessels and waterpots. Finally, he is unable to resist modelling an animal and takes over from Bansi Lal, to complete a horse with rider which is offered at an open shrine in the fields. The thrown parts were prepared yesterday, the head a cylinder which he bends in half to form the neck and head, joining it to the cylindrical body. It is annoying for an artist to carry on with someone else's work, and Sahadev is unhappy with the shape of the head which he has to re-model to the correct proportions (which are very large compared to the body). He complains that whoever threw the parts lacked the skill required to 'get it right'. This is another illustration of strict intolerance for any kind of technical or artistic deviation from traditional forms and methods. The ears are cut from a thrown cone and now the details of mane, bridle, saddle and bells are added, followed by embellishment with coils and buttons of clay. The rider is curiously small in proportion to the horse and once mounted is dressed with the same careful details, including a turban.

On Sundays (market day) the road in and out of Kondagaon is a continuous procession of Tribals dressed in their finery, walking from the surrounding villages to buy



Firing in the village of Masora. Pots are lain on a bed of wood and pre-heated with ignited cow dung placed inside each one. Votive figures are lain on top and covered with more wood and straw, then enclosed with sherds and ash before firing.

foodstuffs, baskets, printed textiles and pots (the area has not yet been flooded with manufactured goods and there is still a constant demand for clay vessels). The importance of the market is vividly portrayed in this extract from *India's Artisans – a status report*.

Besides their obvious economic role, markets perform other important functions as well. Matchmaking is done here through the offices of marriage brokers, who keep an eye out for prospective brides and grooms, while fortune tellers and astrologers are consulted to draw up horoscopes. It is also an important venue for settling village disputes. The tea stall is a favourite venue for exchange of gossip and information, and a little time spent there will give an outsider a fairly good idea of political trends, happenings and events in the area. Entertainment is an integral part of markets. Jugglers and cock fights are common attractions.

Although some pots are sold directly from the village in exchange for money or grain, most are sold through the weekly markets which take place on different days of the week throughout the area. Votive forms are never taken to market but ordered one or two months in advance.

Most firings are carried out on Saturdays in time for the following day's market. The custom here is for open firings but the Centre is trying to introduce a more efficient system of enclosed firing, similar to the one used at Chote Udepur in Gujarat. There is always great reluctance and mistrust amongst Indian potters to try anything which deviates from tradition. This is understandable when the value of a kiln load, representing the week's work of a large extended family, is calculated against the risk of losing everything in an unknown situation. While we are here the Centre is building one of these kilns outside Shankar's house but he is not interested and continues to fire in the open. The open firing is similar to that described in other areas – the pots and votive work placed together with the fuel (wood and straw) and fired without stoking.

The animals we commissioned are drying in the sun and Sahadev says he will offer them to the goddess *Bhairam Devi* in the jungle shrine. We donate money for food, flowers, incense and coconut in order for the *puja* to be performed after they have been fired.

SARGUJA

In India, adornment serves mankind in innumerable ways; attracting gods, protecting people and communities, identifying ethnic groups, or revealing the history and daily life of those groups. Adornment gives men and women a creative outlet that supports society; it grants those of even the lowest classes a meaningful place in the social structure.

Adornment and ornamentation are intricately intertwined with the whole fabric of Indian life, particularly in rural India. (Nora Fisher, curator of textiles and costumes at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico.)

Although India is basically patriarchal and men are dominant in the community, within the home environment women take a dominant role, making all major household decisions. They are responsible for the adornment of walls and floors; this adornment serves the important function of providing the family with protection against malevolence, and creating harmony. The personal deity worshipped in the home is usually female, representing a protective, nurturing

The doorway of Devender Kumar's house of the *Rajwar* tribe in the village of Mendrakala, Sarguja area. The mud walls are whitewashed and windows, doors and niches are edged with wide borders of relief decoration depicting stylised floral and animal imagery linked with triangular patterns. The decoration continues on the walls inside the house. House adornment is carried out by women and serves the important function of providing the family with protection against malevolence from the outside world and creating harmony within the home.



presence often referred to as Lakshmi, goddess of abundance and fortune. By invoking her with rituals it is believed she will reciprocate by bestowing peace, happiness and prosperity upon the family and prevent the entrance of negative forces into the house. The most common rituals are in the form of painting and relief decoration on walls, floors, thresholds, courtyards, doors and windows. Throughout India there are innumerable styles and techniques which all symbolise expressions of this devotion.

The vast majority of village homes are built from mud which, being a porous material, needs to be cleaned and purified regularly in order to avoid contamination, not only from dirt but also from negative energy. (It is believed that the porosity of *kachcha* houses can absorb bad thoughts known as the evil eye.) This cleansing, by spreading a mixture of liquid mud and cowdung over wall and floor surfaces, is carried out on many occasions. These include festival times or rituals connected with seasonal changes such as the sowing of crops, the onset of rain, harvest, or on significant personal occasions such as birth, puberty, marriage, pregnancy and death. After cleansing, the votive painting and auspicious symbols can be applied onto surfaces with earth colours or white rice paste. Stephen Huyler has written, in *Mud, Mirror and Thread*:



Most village homes in India are built of mud which has to be repaired and purified regularly. A woman from the *Baiga* tribe in Mendrakala, Sarguja area cleanses the walls and floors of her house with a mixture of liquid mud and cattle dung. (Cattle dung has antiseptic properties.)

Only in Orissa is the act of applying these designs translated as 'painting'. Everywhere else the verb employed translates as 'to write'. Women say that they will write the patterns and symbols of a *rangoli* or *alpona* to honour the goddess. For a people who are largely illiterate, these designs may be likened to pictographs or hieroglyphs which convey their messages directly to the gods. The rituals of application with their accompanying prayers, songs and stories, form a primary means of communication between the women of the household and their deities.

There is a rich tradition of wall decorating and painting using natural earth pigments amongst the tribal communities of Sarguja which include the *Ahirs*, *Bargaya*, *Baiga*, *Ghasia*, *Gonds* and *Rajwars*. We are able to spend time investigating examples of mud relief decoration and wall



A grain container called *Kotha* 1½m (60in.) high in the home of a family from the *Bhil* tribe, Mandu area, western Madhya Pradesh. It is built from a mixture of mud and wheat chaff covered with liquid dung/clay mix. The opening at the top is covered with a pot which acts as a lid. The auspicious hand prints were applied a month before during the festival of *Diwali*.



painting of the *Rajwar* communities whose work represents the most exquisite examples of this art form in the area. The village of Mendrakala is about 20km (12 miles) from the town of Ambikapur and at the time of our visit in early January the villagers are busy threshing the recently harvested rice crop. It is usual to cut rice just after *Diwali* in November and then plough the fields for wheat cultivation, but unseasonable rains have prevented this and the harvest is unusually late.

Devender Kumar, a farmer and member of the *Rajwar* tribe, lives with his extended family in a large multi-roomed mud house which he re-built with his brother five years ago over a period of four months. As his four brothers have married and produced children, the original family home has had to be expanded and now 11 members live here. The square house with tiled roof is built around a central courtyard edged with rooms, some of which contain huge mud containers 3.6m (12ft) high, for the storage of grain. The walls are whitewashed and the outside windows, doors and niches are edged with wide borders of relief decoration depicting stylised flowers, peacocks, trees and geometric triangular patterns which have all been painted in bold black and red ochre. The decoration continues inside, where whole walls have been covered with designs and motifs. The knowledge and skill to build a house like this is passed down from one generation to another and apart from wood, which



Top: Devender and his mother demonstrating tile making. The tile mould is lined with ash and the soft clay beaten into it, sliced off then turned onto a board. His mother sprinkles ash onto the wooden hump mould, places the flat tile onto it, pats it into shape and removes it by lifting the top part of the mould away from the bottom. It can be placed on the ground, and the mould withdrawn without disfiguring the shape. When in production, the whole family is involved and large quantities (many hundreds) can be made in a day.

Above: It is traditional for birds (*Khaprelu Chiria*) to be modelled in clay and attached to the roof tiles in the Sarguja area. Their function is to protect the house from the evil eye and to encourage real birds to alight onto the roof in the hope of hearing their auspicious song.



now has to be bought, (originally it could be collected free from the jungle but the government has set up restrictions to prevent deforestation) none of the building materials call for any expense. They can all be collected or excavated from the family's own land and environment.

Devender describes to us the construction process. A 60 cm (24in.) deep trench is dug to form the foundations and the walls, built with large balls of clay dug from a pit on adjoining land which will become the well. Clay is mixed with rice straw in the ratio of 4:1 and, as with pottery making, women prepare the mixture. During the summer the walls dry very fast and Devender is able to build to a height of 30cm (12in.) a day. Walls are plastered with the same clay mixed with very fine straw in the ratio of 1:1, then washed over with a cowdung/clay mixture followed by a coating of pure white clay. The mud floors are compressed before being covered with the same mixtures. The large grain containers are built by the women in a similar way and, in many parts of Madhya Pradesh, are adorned with bas-relief work akin to the regional wall decoration. The roof structure is constructed from bamboo and the tiles made and fired by the family (this is the only fired item made by non-potters).

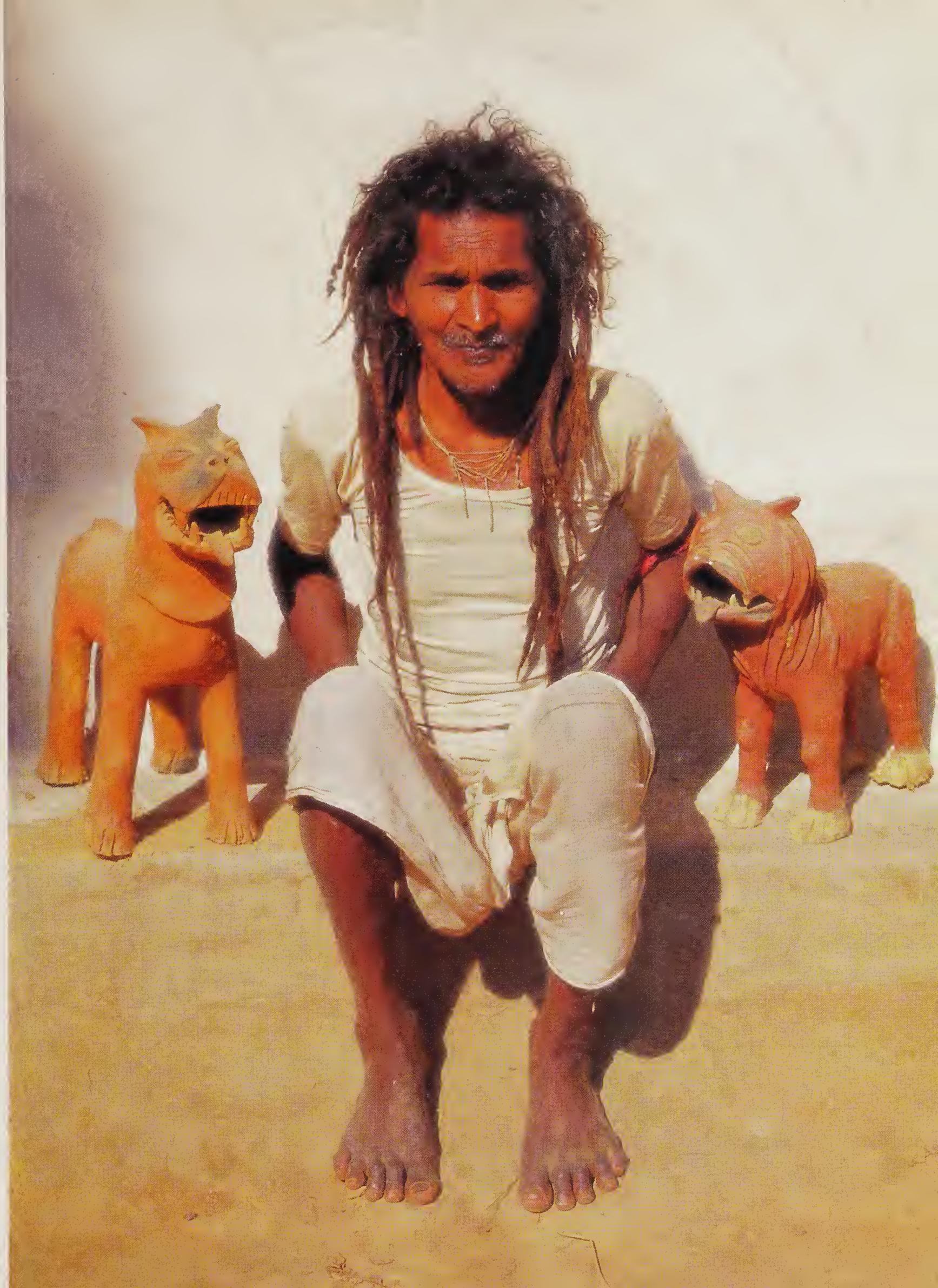
30,000 tiles were needed for the roof, some reclaimed from the previous house, the rest made in the summer when farming work was less demanding, and each one formed in a wooden mould. The clay is excavated locally and soaked in a pit then wedged thoroughly by feet and hands. A wooden plank with a 8mm (0.3in.) rectangular indentation representing the tile is sprinkled with ash, the plastic clay beaten into the mould and sliced across with a wire, then turned

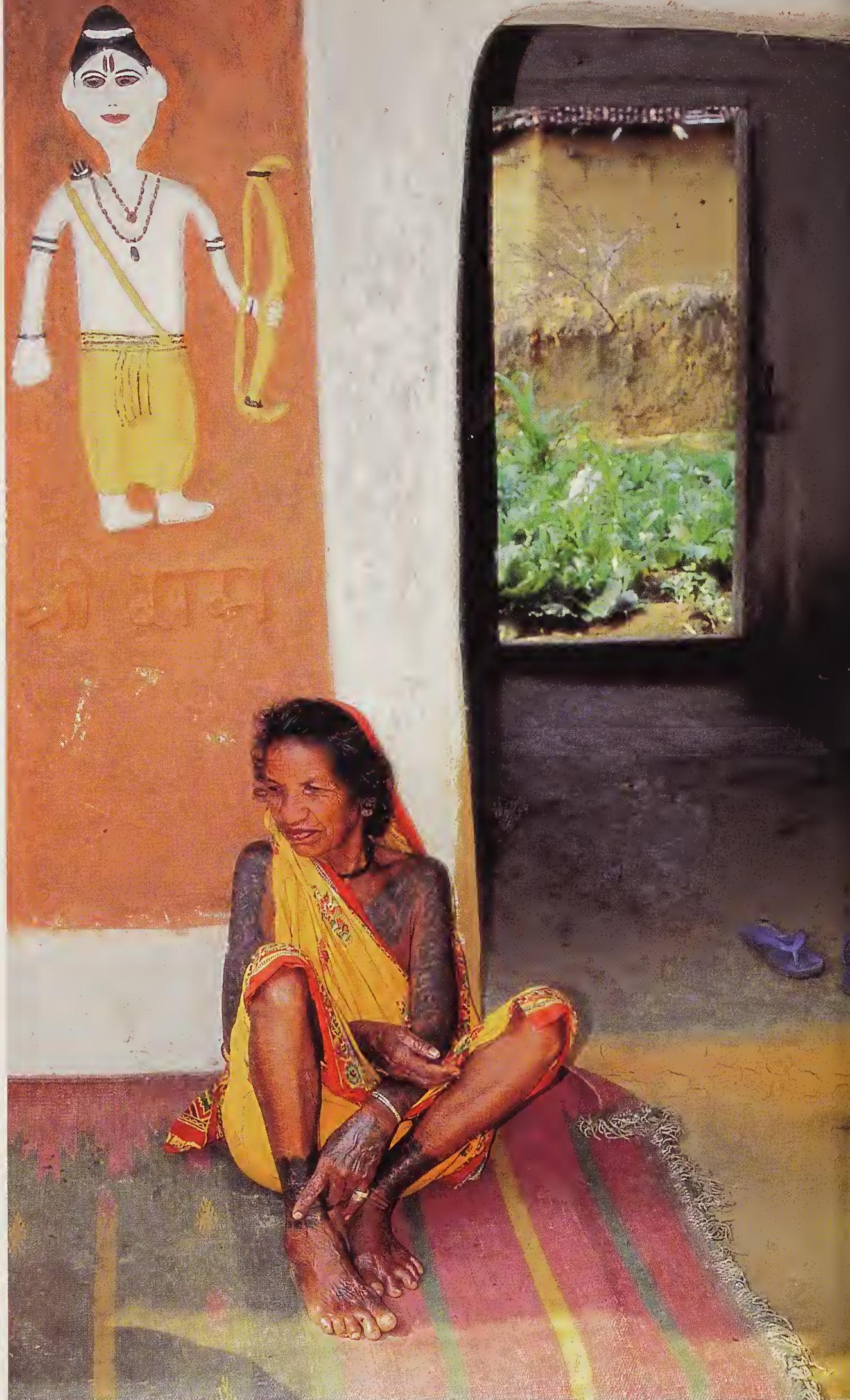


Top: A woman in the village of Sonepur Khurd, Sarguja applying wall decoration called *lipna*. The time between the recent rice harvest and new wheat planting marks an important juncture in the year and is cause for thanksgiving as well as requesting the goddess to provide a further fruitful crop during the coming season. It is important for the *lipna* decoration to be completed by the full moon marking the festival of *Sankranti* in a few days' time.

Above: Details of freshly painted *lipna* decoration, Sonepur Khurd, Sarguja area. A fresh layer of dung mixed with black field clay is applied to the surface followed by a thin coat of whitewash, and while still wet, finger marks are drawn through it interweaving vertical, horizontal, diagonal and wavy lines (a kind of sgraffito).

Opposite: Engorsai Kumbhar of Sonepur Khurd, Sarguja with two of his votive tigers made by throwing and modelling. Once tigers were indigenous to the area and these tigers offered to appease the tiger god, but now most of Engorsai's work is sold through urban markets as decorative items. He is also a *pujari* (potter-priest) and has made a vow not to cut his hair, in order to give him spiritual strength.





A woman from the *Baiga* tribe. Her tattoos are similar to the *lipna* decoration she applies to her house. The relief decoration on the wall is the work of Rameshri Dilbasni and represents part of a hunter and tiger scene.

onto a wooden board. The operation requires several people working together. Now the second person sprinkles ash onto the wooden humpmould (which has been constructed from the shape of a curved cone sliced vertically in two) and places the flat tile onto it, smoothing and shaping it with water and fingers. This humpmould is made in two halves, the top half with a handle so that the tile can be lifted and placed onto the ground and the mould withdrawn without disfiguring the shape. The operation is carried out with great speed and it is easy to imagine the whole family engaged in mass production.

It is traditional for birds to be modelled in clay and attached to the roof tiles. Called *Khaprelu Chiria* in the Sarguja area, their function is to protect the house from the evil eye and to encourage real birds to alight onto the roof in the hope of hearing their auspicious song. Examples of these bird tiles can be seen throughout the region, although demand is decreasing as traditional superstitions decline through the influence of mass media. It is unusual for members outside the potter caste to have firing skills, roof tiles being a regular item of the *Kumbhars*' production, but here the Tribals have inherited the knowledge from their ancestors to fire their own tiles. Firing is in batches of 500 using thorny bush and wood as fuel and taking place in the open. Layers of thorny bush and vertically stacked tiles are placed in a circular pile, topped with a layer of bush and the whole enclosed by a layer of wet clay spread across the surface. A stoking channel leads to a column 20cm (8in.) in diameter rising up through the centre of the pile; once ignited, the fire is stoked with wood.

The front wall of Devender's house separates the familiar, secure inside world of the family from the unfamiliar and insecure outside and must therefore be safeguarded. Four years ago, when the house building was complete, his wife Bimla Bai modelled the bas-relief decoration to prevent the entrance of disease or harm and to keep her family free from trouble. She was taught by her mother; this was the first opportunity to demonstrate her skills to her in-laws and now she has taken over the responsibility for wall decoration from Devender's mother. The clay for relief modelling is collected from the same field used for tile clay and is mixed with an equal part of fine straw. The wall is rubbed clean to obtain a smooth texture, then pinches of clay applied quickly and deftly with the hands to form ridges, lines, curves and dots. A vocabulary of designs are produced, based on local natural plant, bird and animal life. The designs are painted with natural clay pigments: white (collected locally), the red and black colours purchased from the market. Unlike wall painting, this bas-relief work is a permanent fixture lasting as long as the wall and, in order to prevent the surface from cracking and crumbling, a fresh coat of clay and dung is applied from time to time.



Rameshri Dilbasni of the Baiga tribe from Rangpurkali, Sarguja, making a model of *Tanginath Devta* to be worshipped before rice planting at the start of the monsoon in June. The skeleton of the figure is made from bamboo and grass, then the form gradually built up with a mixture of clay and pulped corrugated paper. Rameshri is working with paper clay in a remote village in the heart of Tribal Madhya Pradesh. During the 1990's American potters claimed the invention of paper clay and wanted to patent it!

The time between the recent rice harvest and planting of a new wheat crop marks an important juncture in the year and is cause for thanksgiving as well as requesting the goddess to provide a further fruitful crop during the coming season. Many households in the area decorate their houses at *Diwali* in November, but this year the women were prevented by unseasonable rain. Now it is important to finish the cleaning and wall painting by 12th January, the full moon marking the festival of *Sankranti*. Everywhere throughout the region, women, aware of the approaching deadline, are furiously preparing their house walls for a fresh decoration called *lipna*. A fresh layer of dung mixed with black field clay is applied to the surface, followed by a thin coat of whitewash; while still wet quick finger marks are drawn through it, interweaving vertical, horizontal, diagonal and wavy lines (a kind of sgraffito). The painting is built up in rectangular blocks, each one about 90 x 60cm (3 x 2ft). Women from the *Rajwar* tribe who carry out this style of wall painting have evolved a wide repertoire of designs and symbols, such as *Lavangphul* – flower of the cloves, *Ghutna*

Juta – meeting of the knees, *Bhogla Pankh* – features of the *bhogla* bird, and countless others. The painting is rendered with great freedom and rhythm and enormous speed. I watched a woman taking great pride in the decoration of a 3 x 1.5m (10 x 5ft) wall in ten minutes.

The *lipna* decoration is similar to the linear tattoo motifs worn by women of the *Baiga* tribe in the Sarguja area. It is believed that after death all material things are left behind, except the tattoo marks which are seen as adornment to the spirit and so can accompany it directly to god. Tattooing is carried out at various stages of a girl's life, beginning at seven years, then at puberty and again just before marriage. The immense suffering involved is believed to develop a tolerance for the later pain of childbirth. Tattoo motifs reflect not only the natural environment of the Tribals (animals, birds, plants) but are also related to agriculture and cattle breeding. Agricultural implements, animals, threshing tools, sickles, pestle and mortars, stoves, baskets and pots are all depicted in various designs. Each tribe has different tattooing rules, concentrating the patterns and motifs on various parts of the



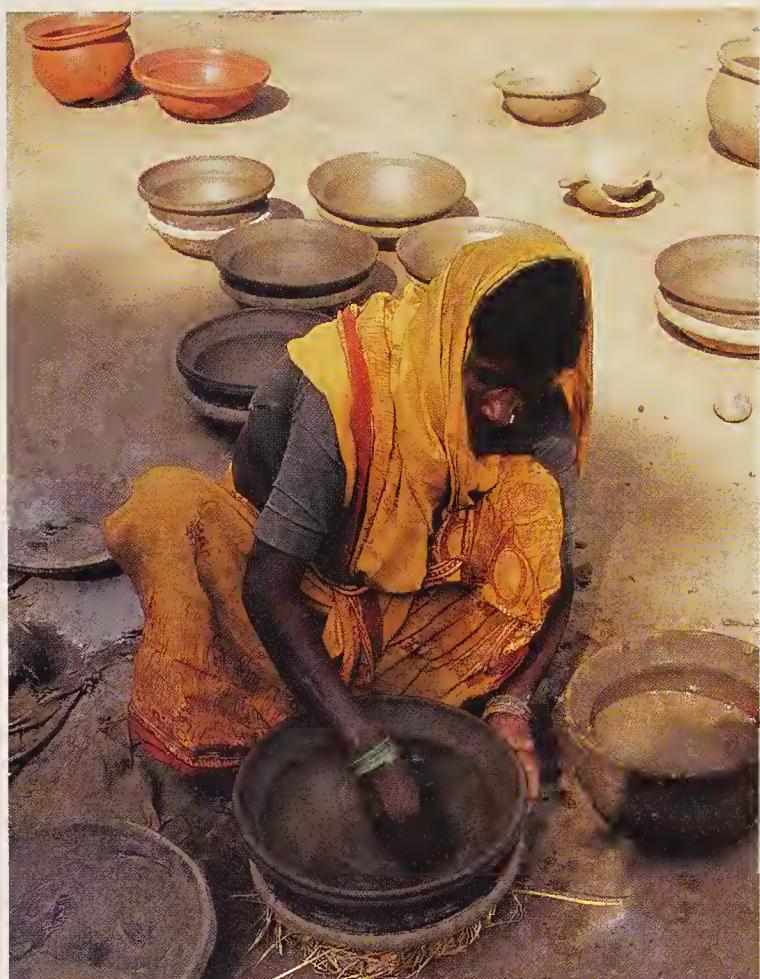
Rameshri painting one of her unfired animal forms with natural earth pigments. It is not traditional for non members of the *Kumbhar* (potter) caste to carry out firing (apart from roof tiles and some cooking vessels) so votive forms are left unfired.

body. For example, patterns representing the elephant god *Gaj – karan Dev*, tattooed on the feet and toes of a woman from the *Baiga* tribe, empowers her with the strength of an elephant, enabling her to carry heavy loads to distant places.

Integration between Tribal and other communities in Madhya Pradesh has resulted in the assimilation of customs between the two, so that many Tribal deities have been recognised as village deities and worshipped by non-Tribal groups. Similarly, several Hindu festivals have been adopted by Tribals and the life of *Krishna* (a most celebrated and popular Hindu deity) is depicted in bas-relief on the walls of Tribal homes. We are in the courtyard of Rameshri Shrimati Dilbasni of the *Baiga* Tribe, and she shows us the bas-relief decoration she has modelled on the walls, depicting images of the Hindu gods *Shiva* and *Hanuman*, as well as hunting scenes incorporating elephants and tigers alongside images of birds and plant life.

Rameshri's caste occupation is farming but she also makes stylised animal forms from a mixture of paper and clay modelled over an armature made of straw. I had seen examples of her work in Delhi Crafts Museum and now I am able to watch her at work.

I have mentioned elsewhere in this book how there has been a great deal of interest amongst potters in the West around the subject of paper clay, with a belief that it has recently been 'invented' in the USA, so I am curious about the development of Rameshri's work. She tells me that originally she made votive modelled figures and birds to be attached to roof tiles but the heavy weight of the solid figures led her to fill them with straw. This was her explanation and we were unable to ascertain how exactly this idea led her to mixing clay with paper. Corrugated paper is soaked in water then pulped and mixed with an equal proportion of clay collected from the local river. The skeleton of the animal is constructed from bamboo and grass, then the form gradually built up by adding the clay mixture through modelling and refining techniques. When dry, it is painted with natural clay pigments – white, yellow and red ochres and black. The range of animal and bird forms are sold in Bhopal and Delhi where she also demonstrates. She greatly enjoys the opportunity to travel from this remote village where there is no electricity and the nearest tarred road is 10km (6 miles) away.



Boondobai Kumbhar of Saskalo, Sarguja area making cooking pots by a combination of pressmoulding, beating and scraping. She turns a straw ring on the ground which supports the mould while she beats the inside with a stone anvil. A cloth dipped in water is held around the rim to refine it while turning the ring. Although using handbuilding methods, Boondo can complete one of these cooking pots in eight minutes. Speed is an essential part of a potters' skill in India as the selling price in the market place is low and potters need to mass produce in order to reach a subsistence standard of living.



Gujarat

Gujarat lies along the north-western coast, bordered by the Arabian sea to the west, Pakistan to the north, and Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra to the east and south. The areas in this section were selected through the expertise of Haku Shah, via my interpreter Rakhee Kane who had worked with him as a research assistant. Haku Shah is considered to be one of India's most eminent authorities on folk and tribal art and has a deep and compassionate understanding of the plight and status of potters.

Like many other Indian states, a large proportion of Gujarat's inhabitants are Tribal, totalling 15 million (14% of the state's population), and represented by 28 different tribes such as the *Bhilis*, *Rathvas*, *Chodhris*, *Dublas*, *Naikas* and *Vasavas*. Their way of life is predominantly agricultural and pastoral and their culture dominated by a distinctive set of beliefs and customs derived from India's earliest inhabitants, and separate from the mainstream Hindu tradition. Their systematic persecution by Hindu castes is a shocking and tragic story not unlike that of the Australian Aborigines or the American Indians and still continues today, despite efforts to introduce positive discrimination by the government. As well as producing tools and articles of daily use for themselves and all their implements for work, they are also creative as painters, sculptors, musicians, singers, dancers, poets and storytellers. Each significant act of life and rite of passage is marked by a special ceremony, often involving the offering of a votive terracotta at a shrine.

Shrines or sanctuaries can be found throughout rural Gujarat in such places as the summit of a hill, amongst the shade of trees or on a barren field; usually in a deserted spot but always emanating a mystical, spiritual aura. Most Tribals believe their gods cannot be represented by images, and direct their worship towards wooden posts or simple clay pots which function as a focus for prayer. Walking through a forest or amongst fields, it can be a powerful experience to come across one of these shrines where hundreds of clay figures are placed one against another in a mass of juxtaposed forms.

Opposite: A shrine in the Chota Udepur area. Each village has its own shrine and placing an offering at another shrine can be construed as trespass, and can result in in-fighting between rival tribes. Most of the terracotta here has been made by Puna and his brother Shankar.

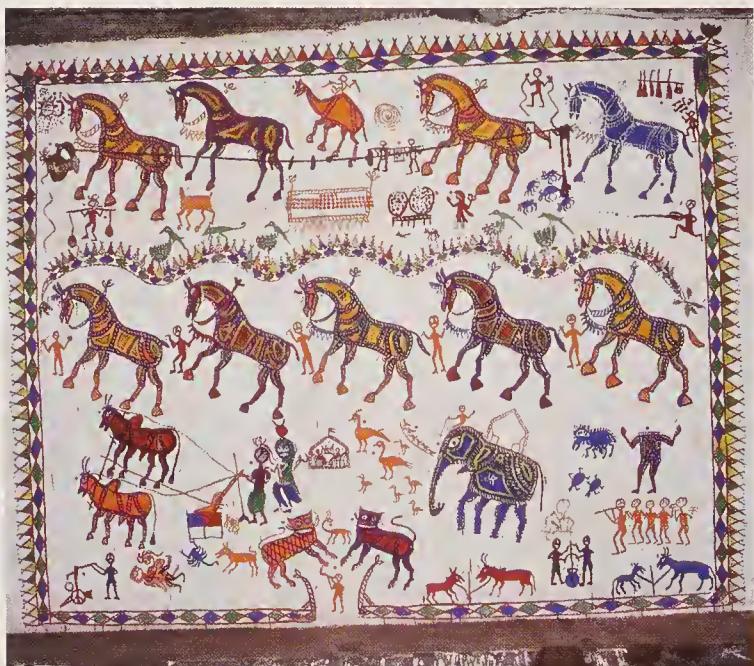


There may be horses, elephants, tigers, cows, bulls, buffalo, and replicas of insects or pests which damage the crops, as well as human figures. *Dhabu* are dome-shaped houses which are offered to house the spirit of the dead.

Of all these clay figures, the horse is the most important and offered the most frequently; it is said that if a vow has been made to the Mother Goddess and not kept, she will appear in a dream, sit on that person's chest and ask, 'Why did you not give me the horse you promised me?' Part of the horse's significance can be traced to the horse sacrifice of ancient Vedic times, where a consecrated horse was allowed to roam at will for a year, followed by a band of warriors. Chieftains on whose territory the horse wandered were forced to do homage or fight and if the horse was not

Below: Painting of the legend of *Pithoro* 300 x 200cm (118 x 79in.) in a Rathwa Tribal home, Chota Udepur area. The horse has been a major symbol of votive offering through the medium of painting as well as terracotta since ancient times when horse sacrifice was performed. The painting represents the marriage of *Pithoro* and is executed at a time when the family is afflicted by great misfortune. If the calamity is averted the family will venerate *Pithoro* and commission a painting on the walls inside the house.

Bottom: Horses and spirit houses (*Dhabu*) offered underneath a tree shrine on the Gujarat/Madhya Pradesh border. Walking through a forest or amongst fields, it is a powerful experience to come across one of these shrines. Styles of horses change every 30 to 50kms (19 to 30 miles) in this area.



captured it was brought back to the capital and sacrificed at the end of the year. It was the ambition of every important king to perform a horse sacrifice.

The styles and techniques of the terracotta figures vary from area to area, changing every 30 to 50km (19 to 30 miles) and ranging in size from 2cm to 1m (.75in. to 39.4in.) high depending on the quality of clay. In south Gujarat, where the clay is not suitable for throwing, the terracottas are neither large nor entirely hollow, whereas in north Gujarat the clay is excellent for throwing and large hollow forms predominate in that area.

While big shrines are in remote places and may require the Tribal to travel large distances, each village has its own small replica of a sanctuary, so that if travelling is not possible, the villagers can place offerings at the local shrine. There are many Tribal gods to whom terracottas are offered, including ancestral gods, gods for crops, field gods, medicine gods and animal gods. *Kakabaila* is the smallpox god, *Bharamdev* the hill god, *Ahindrodev*, *Tubraj*, *Bhaker* and *Kalakadad* are mountain gods, *Govaldev* is the cowherd god and *Devlimadi*, *Dhabasma* and *Khedbaima* are forms of the Mother Goddess.

Terracotta offerings are made either individually or collectively and can consist of single items, or sometimes groups of clay figures numbering as many as 40 or 50. The reasons for offering are many and varied: at different stages of the crops' growth; for the general wellbeing of an individual or a village; to protect against ill health; as offerings to ancestors when installing the spirits of the dead; during the disease curing ritual; for infertility in humans



and animals; when cows and buffalo do not give milk; to recover property after theft; and even if the devotee intends to commit a theft.

Originally the Tribals probably made their own votive clay objects (unfired) but now they mostly buy them from the potters, and as a result an important relationship has developed between the two. By understanding and fulfilling the Tribals' religious needs the potter can secure a steady income, and in return the Tribal appreciates the potter's creative skills and relies on him to provide the important vehicle through which he can communicate with the gods. Haku Shah, in *Votive Terracottas of Gujarat*, describes the collection and offering of the terracottas:

Right: Detail of a shrine in the Chota Udepur area. Many different figures are offered including elephants, tigers, cows, buffalo, replicas of insects or pests who damage the crops as well as human figures. Hundreds of terracottas are placed one against another in a mass of juxtaposed forms. In the foreground are recently offered figures and behind them a jumble of previous offerings which will gradually be reabsorbed into the earth, a reminder of the impermanence and regeneration of everything in nature.

Below: A row of potters' houses on market day in Dedhant, Chota Udepur area. The festival of *Diwali* is approaching, celebrated by the Tribals in this area at a different time of year to their Hindu neighbours. It is traditional to buy a horse, spirit house and clay lamp to offer the deity in return for granting a request. There are several different styles and sizes of horses to choose from.



Whenever the Tribals have to make an offering of horses or other objects they approach the potter to place an order and from this initial stage until the offering is made at the shrine strict rules and precedents govern every action. Where small offerings are made, the terracottas are taken to the sanctuary along with live chickens, incense, rice, coins, liquor and coconuts. For more important ones, everything starts with the sending of invitations to friends and relatives. Then the villagers, together with the *patel* (head of the village), the *pujari* (priest), the *dholi* (drummer), and the *shenai* (pipe player), all present themselves at the potter's house. The terracottas are collected and the potter is paid in rice or maize as well as money, depending upon the size of the order. He is also given coconuts, liquor and a live cock, which is let loose if he does not wish to eat it.

Leaving the potter, the terracottas – horses, elephants and human figures – are hoisted on heads and shoulders. Then the procession starts, accompanied by singing and dancing all the way. Great care is taken when carrying the terracottas because if they are to be offered they should not break or be damaged in any way. If this happens, the Tribals feel it is inauspicious and immediately replace it with another figure.

At the sanctuary the Tribals get ready for the final ritual. The terracottas are offered, each one marked with blood or a dot of vermillion powder. Flags are flown and lamps are lit. Live chickens and goats are sacrificed, according to the vows made, and the meat is distributed to all those present to be cooked and eaten later. The liver, however, is offered to the god. Music, dancing and feasting reach fever pitch. The *badvo* or *bhagat* (priest) goes into a trance during which all the ancestors and all the known and unknown elements of the universe are invoked. Towards the end a man climbs a tree or on to a platform and throws rice over all those assembled. Everyone tries to collect this rice which will later be taken home.

The ceremonies are considered by the Tribals not only as ritual actions but also as actions through which the supernatural powers whom they revere act and give a response.

Thus, while offering a terracotta horse, the Tribals say:

*I offer this horse to you, Oh god!
From today you are assured of our devotion.
Do good to us! May your blessings prevail!
May our generations multiply!*

CHOTA UDEPUR

Chota Udepur is a medium sized market town about 100km (62 miles) east of Vadodara (Baroda) and a few kilometres from the border of Madhya Pradesh. It was originally built around its timber trade and now relies mostly on its dolomite mines and factories. On the outskirts of the town, along the main road towards Madhya Pradesh, is a row of houses called Prajapati Lane (*Prajapati* means 'Lord of the People'). Two brothers live here who make votive terracotta and pots for the local Tribal clientele.

Puna lives with his wife Kanta and son Santosh in the middle unit of three terraced houses inhabited by three brothers. There are always signs announcing a potter's house, and as we approach we see an assortment of domestic pots displayed outside, and a few horses balanced on the roof to advertise their ware to potential customers. The houses are made of fired brick and mud with homemade terracotta tiled roofs, and at the front is a porch area covered with palm thatch where they throw on the wheel and conduct sales. A patch of land between the houses and road provides a site for the kiln, the charcoal pit (for reducing), and a pile of sherds.

From left to right: the two brothers Puna and Shankar Prajapati from Chota Udepur, Gujarat. *Prajapati* and *Kumbhar* are the two names for members of the potter caste. There is a contradiction inherent in the two names; *Kumbhar* is associated with people of low status, while *Prajapati* literally means 'Lord of the People'.





A shrine in the Chota Udepur area. Two horses have been offered to the deities represented by the wooden posts. They illustrate the contrast between the older style of horse made by Puna's grandfather thirty years ago, which is on the right, (more abstract) and the smaller one on the left made by Puna, displaying more embellishment and different proportions.

The family originally came from Kalol near Vadodara but 50 years ago Puna's grandfather realised that the Tribals in this area used only clay vessels and the move would mean improved business. Recently, however, sales have been affected by the availability of plastic and stainless steel, resulting in the necessity for their sons to follow other professions such as tailoring, teaching, and the police force.

Puna's brother Shankar lives next door and still works as a potter, but at the time of our stay his production had stopped because his wife was away and there would be no-one to prepare clay and assist him. On the other side the third brother who was a teacher, used to stay, but had recently died. And a fourth brother, a potter, had lived opposite, but he is also deceased. At the end of Prajapati Lane is another larger house where a first cousin is producing cooking and waterpots in vast quantities, helped by a large extended family. The two brothers Puna and Shankar are in their 60s,

with strong, upright physiques from a lifetime of manual work, thick grey hair and a cheerful attitude to life despite their reduced income. 'In our lives the sun has reached 4pm (only two hours to sunset). Early morning when the sun rises is our childhood, 12am our youth and 4pm our old age. We know at 4pm in our lives how to make people happy around us. We have god in our hearts and so we are nice to everyone.' As well as domestic pots and pans and roof tiles, they make votive animals such as tigers and horses.

Day 1

We arrive at the beginning of December, just after the festival of *Diwali* (the Tribals celebrate this at a different time to the Hindus), and their stock is low. They recently completed an order for 60 horses and are now concentrating on building up their stock of domestic pots, but are keen to



A carved wooden memorial figure *Khatri* is installed to perpetuate those who meet with accidental death. This *Khatri* represents the figure of a woman standing on a tiger which killed her.

take us to the local shrines so that we can see their work *in situ*. We take the taxi and drive through a dry bare landscape dotted with *neem* and *baival* trees. The scene is timeless – a Tribal farmer, naked but for a loin cloth, walks behind two white oxen with brightly painted red and blue horns pulling a wooden plough. It is mid-planting season and he is planting wheat and maize.

The first shrine is a couple of kilometres from the main road and surrounded by indigenous *maluudo* trees whose fruit is used for liquor making. Although the area looks isolated and deserted, as always in India, within a few minutes a young man appears to investigate us and upon recognising Puna and Shankar, begins to describe to us the different gods worshipped here. They are represented by wooden posts, each one enclosed by a little wall of stones, and symbolise *Hadarjo Dev*, worshipped for village protection, *Keduu Bhai* for general protection, *Gam Gondhro*

for cattle protection, *Ind Pagran* for shepherd protection and *Kali Bhut* for crop protection.

The brothers proudly show us their handiwork: there are rows of freshly painted horses ranging in height from 20 to 60cm (8 to 24in.) high, domed spirit houses and clay lamps. Behind these most recent additions are lines and piles of previously offered terracottas in various stages of decay, eroded and destroyed by the elements of sun, wind and rain. Over the decades the terracottas will gradually be re-absorbed into the earth, a reflection and reminder of the impermanence and regeneration of everything in nature. As we walk to the back of the shrine, Puna becomes elated as he recognises a horse his grandfather made 30 years before, and it is interesting to see how the style has changed. The older forms are simpler and more stylised, whereas the recent ones, influenced by exposure to television, comics and films have more embellishment and detail.

About a 2km (1.24 miles) drive away is a second shrine, enclosed by a dry stone wall and containing many different animals such as tigers, buffalo, elephants, goats, camels, chickens and eggs, and turtles. Puna explains that each village has its own shrine and placing an offering at another shrine can be construed as trespass and can result in fighting between rival tribes. On the drive back we pass a shrine set amongst *banyan* trees, this time beside the road. Again, as we walk around it a young man appears and tells us, 'Many years back god appeared here – so we started offering horses and the trees grew.' There are some carved wooden memorial figures called *Khatri*, installed to commemorate those who meet with accidental death such as drowning or murder. One of them is the figure of a woman standing on a tiger, flanked by offerings of terracotta tigers, indicating that she was probably eaten by a tiger. There were tigers in the area when Puna and Shankar were young but they are a rarity now and protected by the government.

Day 2

Puna and his wife Kanta are making pots today. The lack of storage space necessitates a constant cycle of making and firing, as they can only store one kiln load of pots at a time. This means that during the season they produce 100 to 150 in a week, these will be bought on market day directly from the potters before they start again with another cycle. Puna has agreed to make a tiger and horse so that we can see his technique in between the pot-making sessions. On a typical day he wakes at 4am, has tea and starts beating yesterday's pots until 10 or 11 o'clock. After a tea break he starts throwing on the wheel – either the basic shape for a waterpot or parts for the votive figures. Wheel work continues for a few hours after lunch and then more beating until 7 pm. Supper is followed by the application of charcoal dust to the pots



Puna's neighbour wedging clay. A rope is suspended from a tree so that she can hold on while stamping and turning over the clay without overbalancing.

(sprayed on to blacken them) and polishing. They take a day off twice a month, on the auspicious occasions of full moon day and no-moon day, as well as any religious festival days connected with the worship of their god *Shiva*. Their making season is October to May, the monsoon falling from June to September when it is impossible to work.

Clay is collected from the surrounding fields – they used to have donkeys but it became too expensive to look after them so now they pay for delivery by tractor every two months. The clay is stored dry in a pile in the room behind the porch where Puna also carries out the beating of the pots. The clay is almost black in colour, highly plastic and because of its fine quality requires no sieving. It is soaked overnight with water and then kneaded by Kanta, first with her feet and then by hand. A rope is suspended from a tree and the soaked clay placed in a pile underneath; she hoists her *sari* up above her knees and, by holding on to the rope with one hand, she can stamp on and turn over the clay without overbalancing

or falling over. Any large stones are removed at this stage and smaller ones at the beating stage later.

Puna has two wheels, an electric one donated ten years ago by a government organisation and the traditional spoked wheel; made from a mixture of mud and human hair, and handed down from his grandfather. Although they have electricity, there are frequent power cuts (as throughout India) so it is practical to use both. There are orange patterns on the front of the wheel and Puna describes how the wheel is decorated once a month on full-moon night, as part of a *puja* to the wheel. There is a special yearly celebration called *Dussehra* when potters everywhere worship their tools. Stephen Huyler describes it in *Gifts of Earth*:

The ceremony begins when the family gathers all the tools in one place (wheels, mallets, anvils, cutting string, incising tools, and compounds used for slipping and painting). If a permanent kiln is used, the tools may be worshipped near it. Then the woman in the potter's family, often his daughters, decorate every implement with designs hand-painted with rice-flour paste. A *Brahmin* may be asked to perform the ritual; if not, a family *pujari*, usually an elder who conducts worship, will serve. Helped by the male potters, he officiates in distributing offerings to the tools, placing flowers upon them (usually hibiscus or marigolds) and putting before them baskets of fruit, coconuts, grains, and sweetmeats. He lights incense sticks and lamps filled with ghee (clarified butter), passes them over the tools, and then sprinkles the objects with holy water. During the entire ritual he chants shlokas; prayers to the clay, to the tools, and to the gods that protect the family and ensure its livelihood. After the ceremony, the offerings are divided among the family members and the food is eaten, bestowing upon each person the blessings of the gods.

Puna explains why potters everywhere worship *Shiva* as their main deity. It is believed he donated their tools to them: the wheel represents *Shiva*'s weapon and the stick was given to turn the wheel; the cloth and string worn by *Shiva* around his waist are symbolised by the string to cut the pot from the wheel and the cloth to finish off the pot. Most potters are highly religious and consider the clay as an embodiment of the Mother Earth Goddess, their tools as sacred, and working on the wheel as a form of prayer. The concentration required to maintain high levels of precision and craftsmanship is a form of meditation. The devotion a potter feels for his craft is especially visible when he creates and models votive terracotta, expressed through the phrase of a Gujarati potter 'Out of eight parts I make a soul' illustrating his belief that he is creating something which will become a living being.

Kanta takes some prepared clay and places it in a pile in front of the wheel. Now Puna squats down and starts it turning with his hand on the spoke before engaging the stick into the hole and, once it is spinning, he begins to throw various sizes of cylinder on the hump; these will be the



Puna throwing parts of the votive tiger and horse on the hump. The spoked wheel is made from wood and a mixture of mud and human hair. Once a month on full moon night it is decorated with painted patterns as part of a *puja* to pay homage to the wheel, the source of their livelihood.

component parts of the horse and tiger. Indian culture is rich with myths and legends and he makes frequent reference to them as he works:

Once upon a time you used to pay homage and offer *namaste* (greeting) to the wheel and it would start – then *namaste* again when you wanted it to stop. Then a potter forgot to pay homage when he finished working – he went on a pilgrimage and it kept on rotating until he returned – so he was angry and kicked it. So now it won't turn unless you start it by hand?

He throws two large closed cylinders which will become the bodies of the horse and tiger, using a piece of wet cloth to smooth the surface and a string to cut them off, carefully placing them on a *khakara* leaf. Kanta carries them into the sun to dry and he continues to throw smaller cylinder forms which will become the heads, and tall thin cylinders which will become the legs.

We are staying at the local Public Works Department Guest House and go back for lunch prepared by the resident Rajasthani cook and his family. Today I return some plates to the kitchen and am confronted with four daughters-in-law and their children, who number at least ten, all engaged in peeling vegetables, cooking, making *chapatti* dough, rolling out *chapattis*, washing up etc. The most intriguing

aspects of Indian culture to me are not the Taj Mahal or the great temples but grassroots, everyday activities like these, approached from an unfamiliar perspective, overturning beautifully the everyday activities we take for granted. Peeling vegetables with a knife held in the hand, for instance, is substituted here by shaving them along the edge of a stationary sharp vertical blade. I am instantly a friend and am offered cooking lessons which I reluctantly have to decline. It is easy to get diverted here and I am continually required to muster great self discipline to stay focused on the life and work of *Kumbhars*.

Returning to Prajapati Lane, the families are quiet and resting inside. I lie on the *charpoy* in the sun and fall into a snooze, the sound of Hindi music coming from a newly acquired ghetto blaster belonging to Puna's son. Suddenly I hear a lot of commotion inside the house – the whole extended family is crowded into the kitchen area looking up at the flared head of a cobra which has crawled over the gap above the door leading outside. The cobra is worshipped throughout India as a snake god and, by entering their home, signifies a most auspicious event. Their faces express a mixture of elation and apprehension!

Day 3

We are greeted by the children who tell us they were frightened to go to the toilet this morning because the cobra is still there, and explain the smoke coming from the kitchen is to encourage it to leave. It has been raining in the night (unseasonably) which means Puna will not be able to carry out the planned firing tomorrow. Although he has beaten his quota of pots early this morning the humidity slows up the drying process. He is sitting on a hessian sack with the thrown pots lined up and ready to assemble, the knife and some water at his side are his tools. He takes the closed cylinder and by cutting a mouth, adding soft clay to model the shape and flattening discs of clay for ears, it becomes the head and neck of a rather benign looking tiger. He marks out the eyes and presses into the clay to make whiskers. As he models the clay he talks about a Tribal shrine in the area which is regularly visited by a tiger, but because the devotees believe he is coming to visit god they leave it alone.

He works with absorption and devotion, 'I take my own time that it doesn't lose its character – it has to look like a tiger.' He enjoys this work more than the vessel making which represents the backbone of his production; small horses are kept in stock because they are in constant demand, but the larger animals like this are only made to order. He cuts the head at an angle and gauges a hole into the large cylinder, slotting the neck into the hole and joining it with soft clay. The legs are attached in a similar fashion and now he rolls out some coils on the ground which will become the collar.



Kanta is watching and comments, 'You've given a very big collar' to which Puna replies, 'It's a pet tiger so it needs a thick one!' Each item, whether a domestic pot or a votive terracotta, should conform exactly to the prototype and any deviation is frowned upon; there is no value in personal expression. The tiger has taken 30 minutes to assemble and now Puna starts on the horse.

He cuts a cylinder into two halves and re-joins them with soft clay at a 90° angle. After reshaping it becomes the head and neck of a horse. A small cone is divided in two and joined onto the head to become the ears. The mane and eyes are formed, and a coil of clay representing the bridle attached and decorated with an incised pattern. Because the



Above: Puna modelling the horse's head. Each item whether a pot or votive terracotta should conform exactly to the prototype and any deviation is frowned upon. There is no value in personal expression amongst traditional potters.

Left: Puna finishing a votive tiger, working with absorption and devotion. Vessel making forms the backbone of his production; small votive animals are kept in stock but larger figures such as this tiger are made to order.

clay is very fine and has no additions, Puna makes a wire armature for the reins to support another clay coil. He checks the narrow cylinders are the same size and cuts four holes into the body, fitting the legs in with soft clay and checking they are of even length. The head is slotted into a hole in the same way and he finishes by embellishing details with coils and balls of clay. As he works he describes the horses his grandfather used to make, 'So big that one man couldn't carry them. Then the wood and clay were free and in abundance – now we have to pay for everything.'

The snake has appeared two houses along and they are trying to smoke it out by burning dried flower petals. It seems to be the main topic of conversation. Now someone is shouting that it has reappeared upstairs in Puna's house. There is a pregnant woman living next door and they are worried that she will see the snake, believing that this would damage her baby. The horse and tiger are left inside for three or four days to dry slowly then outside in the sunshine for a day before being painted with *gheru* (slip) and decorated by Kanta with white lime paint.

Day 4

Eventually, a local man was called to the house to recite a special mantra to the cobra and, much to everyone's relief, its response was to leave. Today the road is busy with people from outlying villages walking to the weekly market in Chhota Udepur and they stop to buy from Puna. For sale there are a pile of open dishes used for cooking *chapattis*, and various shaped pots for the collection and distillation of liquor. Although Gujarat is a dry state, liquor is an important part of Tribal culture. Earthenware pots are hung from the *tadi* palm trees to collect its sap which is then distilled in large blackfired vessels. People the world over like to gossip about their neighbours and Puna points to a policeman who regularly visits the house opposite, inhabited by a Tribal family who illegally distil liquor. A kind of extortion racket is going on – the distillers avoiding arrest by providing the policeman with alcohol.

Money exchange has now largely replaced the barter system, Puna says, 'I used to give a vessel to a Tribal in exchange for half a bag of grain so we had a lot of things to eat but no money. Now for the smallest candle holder we take money – nothing is free.' Although most sales are conducted directly, there are some potters in town who are no longer involved in production and buy wholesale from Puna, re-selling the ware in local markets. A further decrease in sales has occurred because of the transportation system introduced to bring the Tribal villagers into the dolomite factories

in town. Whereas a few years ago, potential customers walked past, now they pass by in jeeps containing up to 40 people packed inside, on the roof and clinging to the sides. Puna says, 'Somehow in this business we manage to feed ourselves but there's no money left over for extras. At least I have a roof over my head and can feed my children and that's why I believe in god.'

We are taken to the market by Puna's granddaughter and a feast of colour unfolds as we walk through mounds of fruits and vegetables and piles of block printed cloth sold as *sari* lengths. A woman from the *Rathwa* tribe is selling clay dishes (*tavala*) with lids, the insides of which are covered with black shiny lacquer and look very different in their design and technique to those made by the local potters. 'In a lacquer vessel food tastes nicer and one saves on oil too,' the stallholder tells us. Although most clay items are made by the potter caste, some of the Tribal women in this area make press-moulded dishes with a shallow, wide lip. They are lightly burnished, fired in the open with dung and wood, then withdrawn from the fire while hot and rubbed with lacquer in the form of a stick taken from the *kosumbdo* tree. Another stall is selling bows and arrows, the hunting weapon of the *Bhil* tribe. My companion Rakhee comments on the paradoxical juxtaposition of a line of torch batteries for sale at the back of the stall; a reminder of the meeting between the late 20th century and a tradition dating back to pre-Aryan times.

Lacquer covered cooking pots made by members of the *Rathwa* tribe at a market on the border of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, Chota Udepur area.



Day 5

Puna has two kilns which are simple rings made from fired brick covered with a mud and cowdung mix. The top diameter is narrower than its base and the large one has 11 stoking holes, the smaller one seven. Whereas the protective coating needs to be replaced frequently, the brick walls will last around five years before they need to be rebuilt. The two sizes give him some flexibility so that he can fire small loads quite regularly, or if he has a large order it is more efficient to fire a bigger load. Votive work and pots are usually fired together.

The greatest expense for every potter is always fuel and whereas votive terracotta is acceptable when low-fired, waterpots require higher firing in order to be functional. Yesterday a handcart was hired and the brothers went to the local timber yard to buy wood – the small kiln will require 50kg (110lbs) and the larger 100kg (220lbs). Kanta carries out a selection of waterpots and horses from inside, placing them on the ground next to the kiln. Now Puna begins the packing, starting with a layer of sherds on the ground at the base of the kiln. He carefully places a layer of waterpots on their sides, their mouths facing to the centre so that the wood can be pushed into the gaps between them. Now the horses are lain carefully over the pots and covered with another layer of sherds. Wet clay is spread over the sherds to keep in the heat. Kanta sweeps the area around the kiln clean and Puna and Shankar begin pushing three branches of wood into each of the seven stoking holes, sprinkling them with kerosene before ignition.

As the flames rise up Puna chants this song taught to him by his forefathers:

*Beware, o insects, the fire is coming,
The kiln is set afire
Beware insects, ants and all living beings.
May the evil caused by killing these insects
Fall upon him who has returned evil for good
And takes away things without appreciation.
May the Lord strike such a one with leprosy.*

Now other members of the family help with the stoking, which lasts for about 30 minutes, and once Puna is satisfied with the colour of the glow inside, the burning logs are retrieved and quenched with water to be used again. For a black firing the kiln is stacked so that a hole remains through the centre of the pile from top to bottom. When the firing has reached temperature the flames are allowed to die down before stoking sawdust into the central hole. It is then smothered with a mixture of charcoal dust and clay, the firemouths being sealed in the same way. The charcoal ash is produced during every firing and kept in a pit near the kiln



A black firing in Tejgath, Chota Udepur district. The kiln has been loaded so that a hole remains through the centre of the pile from top to bottom. When the temperature has matured, the flames are allowed to die down before stoking sawdust into the central hole and pushing dried leaves into the stoking holes to increase the smoke. The whole pile and the firemouths are then smothered with a mixture of charcoal dust and clay to seal in the smoke.

for re-use. The failure rate is low – maybe 1 or 2% broken as a result of small stones in the clay.

This is our last day and we are invited to have a goodbye meal with them. I ask Puna and Shankar who will carry on their tradition of making votive figures and pots. 'To keep up our self-respect we have to get our children to go out and earn from other jobs. It makes us sad that they have to take other work for good clothes and good food. We would happily give training to anyone who is interested.' We know this is not very likely.

MANDVI

The town of Mandvi is situated next to the river Tapi about 80km (50 miles) inland from the coastal area of Surat, its inhabitants engaged in diamond cutting and farming. There are two potters' colonies here but only one is still involved in production, and within that colony of 60 houses only 20 are still working with clay. Most of the houses are *pukka* and made of cement, displaying the relatively high standard of living of the *Kumbhars* in Gujarat compared to other states. There are about 150 villages in the area around Mandvi, mainly inhabited by the *Vasava*, *Gami* and *Chaudhri* tribes, and their need for votive terracotta keeps the potters in business.



The four sister-in-laws who work together.
(From left to right)
Hansa, Pushpa, Savita
and Damyanti from
Mandvi, Gujarat.

There are hundreds of rows of lime-painted animal figures of various styles and sizes lining the porches and steps of the potters' houses. My formula for finding a suitable family to work with (unless previously arranged) is to look around the colony and use intuition and sixth sense to lead me to the right one. Because potters in India are low-caste, and their skills undervalued, they are always surprised that a European would be interested in their work. They are doubly surprised that I too am a potter and have knowledge of clay, processes and firings. I carry photos of my work to prove I am genuine, and a copy of my book *Smoke-fired Pottery* to give an idea of the kind of publication they will be featured in.

Pushpa lives with her husband Natvarbhai, son Katan and daughter Kamini, in a house built from bamboo and covered with a mixture of mud and rice husk; it is the house of her in-laws which she came to as a young bride. There were originally six brothers from this potter family – two went into the diamond cutting trade, two died and the remaining two are involved in pottery production. The solid terracotta clay figures are made almost exclusively by women in this area and, after the death of her mother-in-law, the customers went elsewhere. Pushpa realised that in order to save the business she would have to carry on production. Although a reluctant student when she first joined the family and was taught the art of modelling, she joined forces with the other three daughters-in-law and for the last seven years they have had a flourishing trade. They successfully juggle terracotta making with the everyday household duties of child rearing, cooking, washing and cleaning. They work for eight months of the year and during the monsoon they make smaller solid horses inside Hansa's workshop, supplementing their income with homework from a local grain factory. At the time of my stay, Hansa and Savita, the other daughters-in-

law, were working with Pushpa, but for most of the time the fourth, Damyanti, was away visiting her daughter.

A potter from Maharashtra lodges with Pushpa and is paid to throw small lamps all day, and a woman next door is hired to prepare clay. At the back of Pushpa's house is a working area shaded by *neem* and *guava* trees. There is a cement building containing a shower and toilet, an area for firing, fuel storage and an area for the fired terracotta horses and spirit houses to be collected by Tribal customers. A second working area is in Hansa's house across the road. This morning it is raining and production has stopped, so they are showing us around. There must be several hundred horses of varied designs, plus elephants, cows with calves, as well as human figures, crammed into every available space, and co-existing quite naturally with the detritus of domestic life. Puna explains 'Our house is our storage – we don't mind sleeping amongst the horses.' Further storage is in the attic where hundreds of water and cooking vessels (made by her husband Natvarbhai) are stacked as well as various clay toys. She explains that the fired waterpots cannot be kept outside because the sound would change and the customer would reject them (a pot is always knocked before purchase to check the sound is a high ring rather than a dull thud which indicates underfiring).

The styles of votive figures are many and varied throughout Gujarat and here the forms have become so stylised they are semi-abstract and barely recognisable as horses. Over the years they have evolved until the solution of balance and support has been solved in the most economical way. In other parts of India the *Kumbhars* have changed their traditional styles to meet the demands of an urban aesthetic corrupted by commercialism, but here, because the Tribals have not yet been exposed to that influence, the forms remain pure and powerful.



Left: A variety of styles and sizes of votive horses for sale outside Pushpa's house in Mandvi.

Below: Horses offered at a roadside shrine housed in a cement building in the Mandvi area. The protective deity is represented by the stone in the centre and offerings of flowers and a clay lamp have been placed in front.



Day 1

A death has occurred in one of the local Tribal communities and yesterday an order was placed for a *Dhabu* which will house the spirit of the dead person. Four Tribal men arrive at the back of Pushpa's house on a bullock cart full of buffalo dung which will be bought by the potters for mixing with their clay and firing. Music is an integral part of Tribal life, whether in joy or sorrow, and an essential accompaniment to the offering of terracottas. As they drive into the yard their musician is playing the *devdovi*, a wind instrument

made from a gourd, bamboo and peacock feathers. They show us a stone resting in the bullock cart which represents the dead man. After inspecting several spirit houses carefully, the men select a medium-sized one and begin haggling to reach an agreed price. Now Hansa paints it with white lime, using a cloth, and selects a small horse which she also whitens with the lime. She explains that when the deceased is male, a horse is always offered with the spirit house and when a female has died then a cow and calf are offered. A *Dhabu* painted with bright acrylic colours and silver would fetch a higher price, denoting status and wealth.



Top, left: Horse by Pushpa's family 32cm (12.5in.) high. Over the years the style and proportions have evolved until the solution of balance and support has been solved in the most economical way.

Top, right: The *Himaryo* horse by Pushpa's family 25cm (10in.) high. It is offered to the field god *Himaryo Dev* after the millet harvest and built by adding a solid neck and stylised leaf-like mane to an inverted pot. *Himaryo* is an interesting example of the adaptation of a functional vessel into a votive form.

Left: An elephant by Pushpa's family 30cm (12in.) high. Various forms of elephants have evolved in Gujarat. This one complete with *howdah* (carrying seat) and *mahout* (master) is a mixture of hollow and solid parts and used by the *Chodhri* and *Gamit* Tribals as an offering to the mountain god *Ahindrodev*.



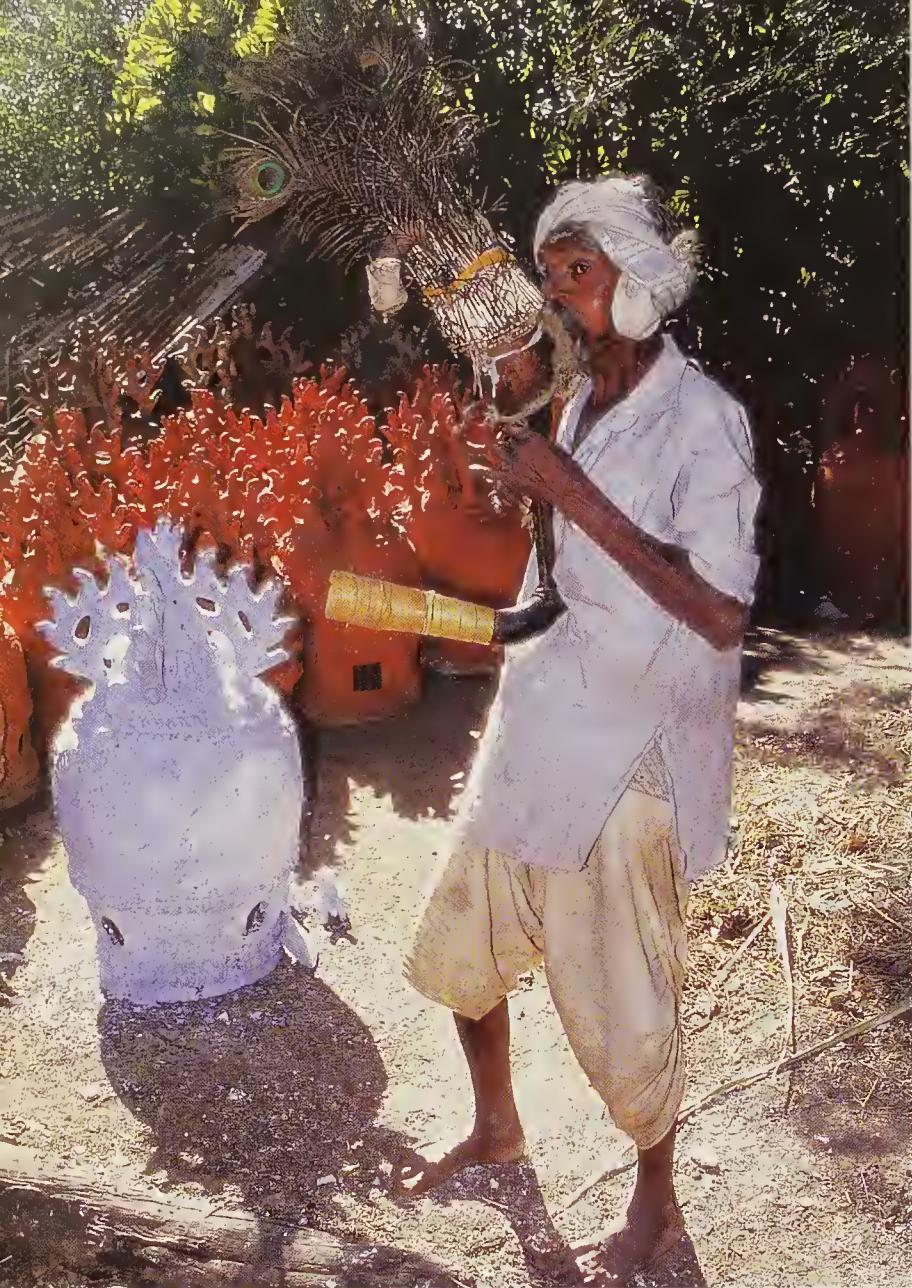


Top, right: Detail of rows of horses displayed outside a potter's house in Vyara, South Gujarat. There are many different styles of horses in Gujarat expressed through the versatility of hand building methods.

Bottom, right: Horse by Pushpa's family 38cm (15in.) high. In Southern Gujarat the figures have become so stylised they are semi-abstract and barely recognisable as horses.

Bottom, left: Horse by Pushpa's family 22cm (9in.) high.





A Tribal musician playing the *devdovi*, a wind instrument made from a gourd, bamboo and peacock feathers as the procession prepares to leave with the *dhabu*. Music is an integral part of Tribal life whether in joy or sorrow and an essential accompaniment to the offering of terracotta.

The musician stops playing to roll a *bidi* and while we wait for the lime to dry they invite us to the funeral tomorrow so that we can see the spirit house installed. It transpires that Pushpa and Hansa have never visited a Tribal shrine or seen the destination of their terracotta animals. We invite them to join us; their acceptance will depend on the stage of production and they will have to assess the situation tomorrow. Now the men lift the spirit house into the cart, cover it with a patterned cloth and Natvarbhai packs straw around it and secures it with rope. Sacks containing vegetables and grain for the funeral feast are loaded into the cart, the oxen are hitched up and they drive away, the sounds of the *devdovi* slowly fading.

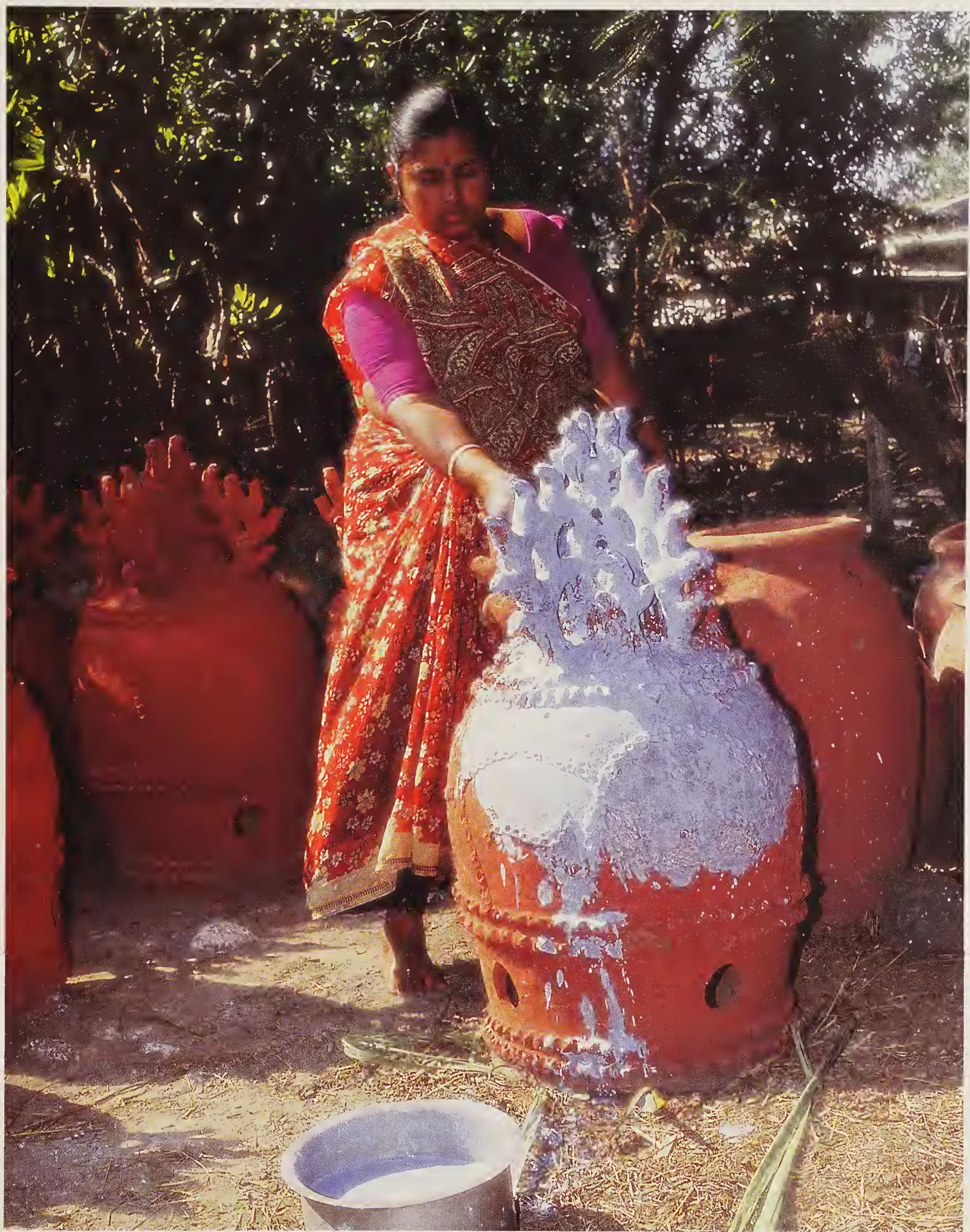
Today the third sister-in-law, Savita, is starting to build the large spirit houses and already there are eight rings lying on the compressed mud floor of the yard. She takes some soft

clay from the prepared pile, re-wedges it on the ground and squeezes it into 7.5cm (3in.) thick coils about 35cm (14in.) long, placing them together to form a ring on the ground. Now she pulls the clay up into a wall using her flat hand, lubricated with water, on the outside and her forefinger on the inside, walking first one way and then the other around the ring. Within minutes the wall is 10cm (4in.) high. Soon there are the bases of 12 spirit houses which will be built by a combination of coiling, beating, throwing, modelling and press moulding, and which will take four to five days to complete, depending on the weather. There is a strict division of labour here: the men throw vessels, the body portions of larger horses and the tops of spirit houses as well as carrying out most of the beating, firing and selling; the women are responsible for clay preparation, handbuilding the smaller horses, modelling, embellishing and decorating, as well as some beating and assisting with the firing.

Clay is no longer free; they must buy it from the farmer who owns the site 4km (2.5 miles) away. They also pay for collection by bullock cart, and need 40 to 50 bullock carts for their yearly supply, lasting them the eight months over which they work. There are three different clay mixes, the spirit houses require a highly fibrous mixture of donkey and horse dung mixed with the clay, the horses are made from a mixture of clay and cow and bullock dung, and for the vessels ash is added to the cow/bullock dung/clay mixture. A fresh supply of clay is made every day, either by the sisters-in-law, or, if they don't have time, by a hired person. Ingredients are collected dry, sieved, then soaked in water and prepared by foot wedging, the same technique as described at Chhote Udepur.

The spirit houses are left for a few hours to dry slightly and now Savita returns and builds up another layer, placing the thick coil onto the edge of the ring and squeezing it to blend with the stiffened clay underneath. This time she walks around with one foot inside and one foot outside the ring and, wetting her hand, pulls the clay upwards to thin and heighten the wall. Now she wets her hands again and, with the palms flat, pats the clay with one hand inside and one outside using an upward action. The rings will be left overnight to stiffen again.

Pushpa and Hansa are sitting on hessian sacks joining together the parts of horses which were made yesterday – they are always made separately in sections and left to dry overnight before assembling. The scene resembles a production line and they will produce 500 horses during the next three months leading up to *Holi*, the colour festival in March. The thrown bodies are already attached to solid legs lined up in front of Pushpa; she takes one and models soft clay to the basic four-legged table shape, to give it form and fullness. Hansa pushes a hole into the top of each body and inserts a solid curved handle which will become the neck.



A *dhabu* has been selected by the family of the dead man and Hansa paints it with limewash.



Pushpa and Savita making horses which are built up in several sections. The smaller ones are modelled from solid clay (mixed with plenty of fibrous donkey dung) and the larger ones built from a central thrown section. The women operate a 'production line' and will produce 500 horses during the 3 months leading up to the festival of *Holi*.

She adds a head, a tail and some decorative lugs using very soft clay. Beside the women is a pile of donkey dung which they continually mix with the clay to make it more fibrous, so that the horses will become light after firing. Eight horses are now lined up in the sun to dry and will be finished later after the women have cooked the evening meal.

Day 2

When we arrive Pushpa is preparing beans and rice for lunch, and the men are sitting on the front porch reading newspapers. There is a power cut and so the diamond factories are closed today. Most potters are illiterate or semi-literate but, because Gujarat is a wealthier state, it has a higher standard of literacy. Pushpa tells us about a typical working day – she rises at 6.30am, takes tea then checks on the parts she made the day before and, if they are ready, starts working straight-away. Otherwise she starts housework and prepares food for the children who leave for school at 10.30am. Once the first batch of work is completed she starts cooking lunch, then clay work again until 7pm when supper is prepared. She often works until 10pm in Hansa's house, where the women can watch television at the same time. There is a great feeling of camaraderie between them and they obviously enjoy their work. Pushpa says, 'We are all of the same age and work

together so it's not boring – we chat and laugh.' If one goes to visit her parents the others will look after her husband and children, or if her relatives turn up when she is away the other sisters-in-law will give them hospitality.

Now Natvarbhai begins beating the rings using a variety of different sizes and weights of wooden paddle in order to thin the walls and increase the height. He starts with gentle movements around the top, becoming stronger as he moves downwards. Savita rolls a coil of soft clay and attaches two rings of fluted decoration to the outside of each ring. They have grown to a height of 45cm (18in.) and are left again for a drying-out period. Natvarbhai has offered to take over Pushpa's work for the afternoon so that she can accompany us to the funeral and shrine, and we leave in the taxi with Hansa and her husband Navin.

Gujarat is a rich, sugar producing area and we drive along dirt roads through bright green fields of tall, ripe sugar cane. We leave the car and walk to a large mud house where all the relatives and friends have gathered. There are at least 200 people, divided into two groups of men and women, gathered to mourn the death of a 35 year old man who had been cremated four days before. The cart with the spirit house stands outside facing a stone, representing the dead man which is now resting on the ground. A group of elders from the village are sitting in a row facing the stone, chanting



Above: The Tribal funeral in a remote village in Mandvi area. A stone representing the dead man has been placed onto the cart beside the *dhabu*. Women climb up on to the cart and paint holy dots of vermillion onto the spirit house and sprinkle it with rice.

and performing a *puja* to all the dead ancestors and members of the family. The men group into a long line and file past the stone, paying homage to the dead man, accompanied by a group of musicians playing their instruments and shaking the *khokhadi* (a long pole with jingles attached). Any social gathering in India is visually overwhelming and this is no exception. The vivid colours of hundreds of *saris* group together and move in a line as the women partake in the *puja*, queuing to pay homage before the stone.

The old men carry the stone to the cart and place it beside the spirit house – now two of them are climbing up and dancing around the house singing to the spirit, 'We have

made this house for you – we'll give you grain, money, even a window in your house.' The women climb up and paint holy dots of vermillion onto the house and sprinkle it with rice. One of the old men lifts the stone onto his shoulder and everyone dances around the cart and throws rice. They return to sit again and tea is distributed to all in folded *kakra* leaves. Pushpa and Hansa are visibly moved by the occasion and say, 'Now we realise how valuable the spirit houses are for the Tribals.'

Later, after more ceremonies, the stone and *dhabu* will be carried to the shrine in a procession and the spirit in the form of the stone will be asked, 'Where do you want to rest?'

By placing it in several positions and sites they will wait for its answer, in the form of resistance to being moved further. Once it has 'stuck' they will place the spirit house over the stone, with its door open so that the spirit can move in and out easily. A clay lamp will be placed inside to give the spirit light, and sweets, rice, and money will be offered which will be replenished regularly. A feast will be prepared back at the house and everyone will eat and drink.

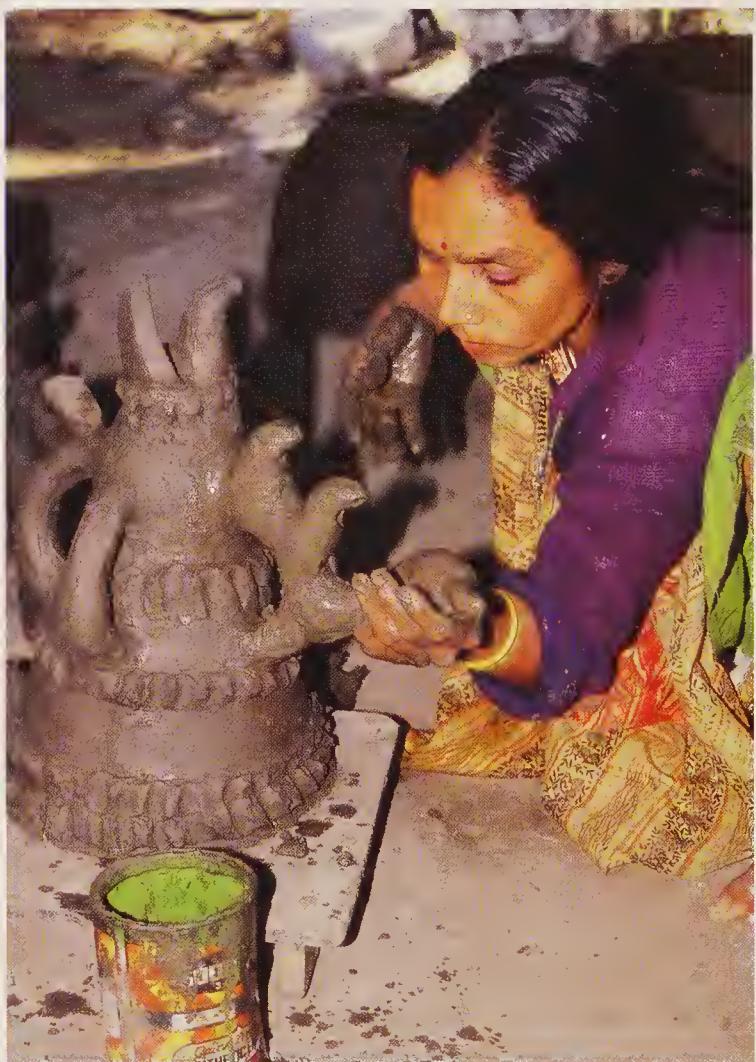
We have decided to go to the shrine ahead of the mourners so that we can look at the *dhabu* and terracotta offerings without interfering with the ceremony. Hansa and Pushpa immediately recognise that 70% of the work has been made by them, and we walk around inspecting spirit houses and animals. Some are in groups and some stand alone, depending on where the spirit wanted to rest, and some are very small containing the spirits of babies and children. After the initial coat of white limewash, many have returned to

their terracotta state and rest under the trees on the hillside, in various stages of erosion. We meet a schoolteacher from the Tribal community here, who informs us that the new generation is uninterested in the depth and length of religious rituals and has started to simplify them. However, a recent spate of bad incidents in the village have convinced them that god is angry and wishes them to re-adopt the traditions, so today there is a full ceremony.

On the drive back we notice a clay pot sitting in the middle of the crossroads – I have noticed it several times already on our journeys in and out of the potters' colony and ask what it is. When someone is suffering from a serious illness a *bhuvo* is called, who helps to extricate the bad and evil from the patient. He places it into a clay vessel and leaves it at the crossroads. Anyone who touches the pot could be contaminated by the disease, so all pedestrians, cyclists and rickshaws are carefully circumventing it.



Natvarbhai Prajapati beating the walls of the spirit houses (*dhabu*) built by coiling, beating and modelling. He walks around the clay rings with a wooden paddle and stone anvil, thinning and refining the shape and increasing the height. These large *dhabu* of around one meter high are built in stages to allow critical drying periods.



Pushpa modelling birds onto the branches at the top of the *dhabu*. The top conical section has been thrown by her husband and will be attached to the lower part later. A press mould is used to form four human faces which will be attached onto the surface in between the birds.

Day 3

The women are already assembling horses, a large pile of prepared clay and powdered donkey dung beside them. The respect they show for the animals they create so skilfully from clay displays the level of significance and importance with which they regard their work. Hansa came here from Vadodara and, because her husband previously had a diamond cutting business, had not expected to work with clay but has grown to enjoy it. When she returns home to her family she misses the work and feels bored. Hansa tells us that when she first arrived here as a young bride the way of life irritated her, the Tribals with their strange rituals constantly coming to buy terracotta, and their music disturbed her sleep. Since she became involved in making the votive work she understands it and has even grown to believe in it:

The older sister-in-law Savita could not make horses and felt inferior to us. She promised to offer a horse if she could learn to make them. Now she is the most skilled of us all. Whatever we want, we offer a horse and the wish gets fulfilled so we believe in the Tribal gods. When they come to buy horses we give them an extra one to offer from us.

She describes further examples of incidents which confirm their belief. *Simaldio dev* is the god who protects tribal land boundaries and when an offered horse is placed on the ground, the devotee makes his wish, 'If my wish is to be fulfilled the horse won't move.' Hansa has tried to move such a horse without success. These are clear examples of the fluid relationship between the Hindus and Tribals, resulting in a merging of religious beliefs. However, Christian missionaries are bribing Tribals in this area to convert to Christianity by offering them free food and charity. The by-product of worshipping Jesus Christ means an immediate decline in the necessity for votive terracotta.

Another coil has been added to the spirit houses and beaten so that the thickness of the wall is about 1.3cm (0.5in.) and later the last coil will be added and beaten to close the top of the dome shape. Natvarbhai threw 12 conical-shaped tops yesterday which have been drying out. Now Pushpa joins the two sections together and makes coiled handles and lugs which are fixed to the cone to represent branches. Later she will model and attach birds to the branches, and further decorate the *dhabu* with incised patterns and fluted ridges. A press mould is used to form four human faces which are attached to the surface between the birds. To enhance drying, holes are pushed into the solid lugs and branches with a metal tool. Lastly she cuts two round windows and two rectangular doors to allow unrestricted entry and exit for the spirit. The *dhabu* will be dried slowly over a period of three to seven days, depending on the strength of the sun.

While she waits for the branches to stiffen, Pushpa shows us the complete range of vessels and votive work made by the family. There are four sizes of spirit house, three sizes of various styles of standing horse, and four sizes of the sitting horse known as *Himaryo*, which is offered to the field god *Himaryodev* after the millet harvest. Barely recognisable as an animal form, *Himaryo* is an interesting example of the adaptation of a functional vessel into a votive form. It is built by adding a solid neck and highly stylised leaf-like mane to an inverted thrown pot. The horses with riders represent policemen and are offered in order to prevent intervention as the worshipper asks, 'Please god stop the policemen harassing us.' Because Gujarat is a dry state, the liquor drinking Tribals are continually harassed by the police and government officials.

The small solid buffalo and cow pairs standing on a platform are offered if animals are infertile, sick or not giving milk. A promise is made to make the offering and if the situation later improves, the terracotta is bought from the potters and taken to the shrine. Elephants and tigers are less in demand and usually made to order. The thrown vessels are black or red, depending on their function, and Pushpa shows us a selection of water pots, pots for making curd and butter, and vessels for cooking in. The containers for distilling liquor are coated with lacquer to render them non-porous. A range of ritual vessels such as those used in the death ceremony, are produced as well as cooking stoves and toys.

Prices are not totally fixed and although there is some leeway for bartering, they feel it is inappropriate to haggle over a spirit house or vessels when needed for such a sad occasion as death. I witness a typical transaction when a Tribal comes to purchase a pot which costs eight rupees – he complains that it was only five rupees last time and Natvarbhai explains the cost of materials has increased. The Tribal only has seven rupees and declines the offer of credit as this is an unacceptable situation to him. So, he takes it for seven rupees. When the customer is from a lower socio-economic group such as this it is difficult to secure the fair price, a problem facing potters everywhere India.

Day 4

Because of the recent rain and cloudy weather Natvarbhai will not be ready for a firing, but as we arrive today the next door family inform us that *they* are preparing to fire today. The daughters-in-law are pre-heating the largest spirit houses by igniting sawdust and dung cakes inside, and later begin to repair any cracks before covering the surfaces with *gheru* (slip). The fuel is assembled beside the firing site and consists of 15 bundles of wood bought from the Tribals, one cart load of straw and a couple of baskets of dried buffalo dung. Their preferred fuel is buffalo dung because it is

cheaper than wood and reaches higher temperatures, but there is a scarcity at the moment and the price has increased.

Nine *dhabu* are placed in three rows, forming a square on the firing site behind their house (the number to be fired is versatile and could be as many as 24 or as few as 3), and the circumference surrounded by inverted pot sherds. The gaps in between the spirit houses will form the stoking channels; in order to gauge the temperature it is important to be able to look through to the other side. Their father-in-law appears and begins to lay horses across the houses, filling in the gaps with small votive animals and figures before placing more sherds around the bottom. Now the pile is

covered with buffalo dung cakes increasing the density at the tops of the houses where they will require more heat. The women carry armfuls of straw and cover the pile, their father-in-law compressing it down with a wooden pole and as he works he complains, 'There are nine of us working on this now and when the Tribals come they offer 100 rupees for a spirit house. Is it possible, I ask you? But I can't work on anything else – it's the only work I can do.'

Now a mixture of cut grass and powdered clay is spread over the straw to weigh it down, and one of the women sweeps the ground clean around the pile. A son appears and pushes several branches of wood about 15cm (6in.) into each



Above: Pushpa's neighbours preparing a firing. Nine *dhabu* are placed in three rows forming a square on ground at the back of their house and the circumference surrounded by inverted pot sherds. The gaps in between the spirit houses will form the stoking channels.



Right: The pile has been covered with buffalo dung cakes and straw. A mixture of cut grass and powdered clay is spread over the straw to weigh it down and a daughter in law pours kerosene into the firemouths before ignition.

firemouth while his wife pours on kerosene. The old man asks god for a successful firing, waving some incense across the pile, and the wood is ignited. Dissatisfied with the flames, he directs his daughter-in-law to pour on more kerosene and the danger is painfully apparent – bare hands, dripping kerosene, nylon *saris* and intense flames. It is 4.20pm and they start covering the raw pots drying in the yard with sacking, to protect them from the increasing heat. The men stoke the wood into the firemouths, pushing it into the centre and shielding their faces from the intensity of the flames.

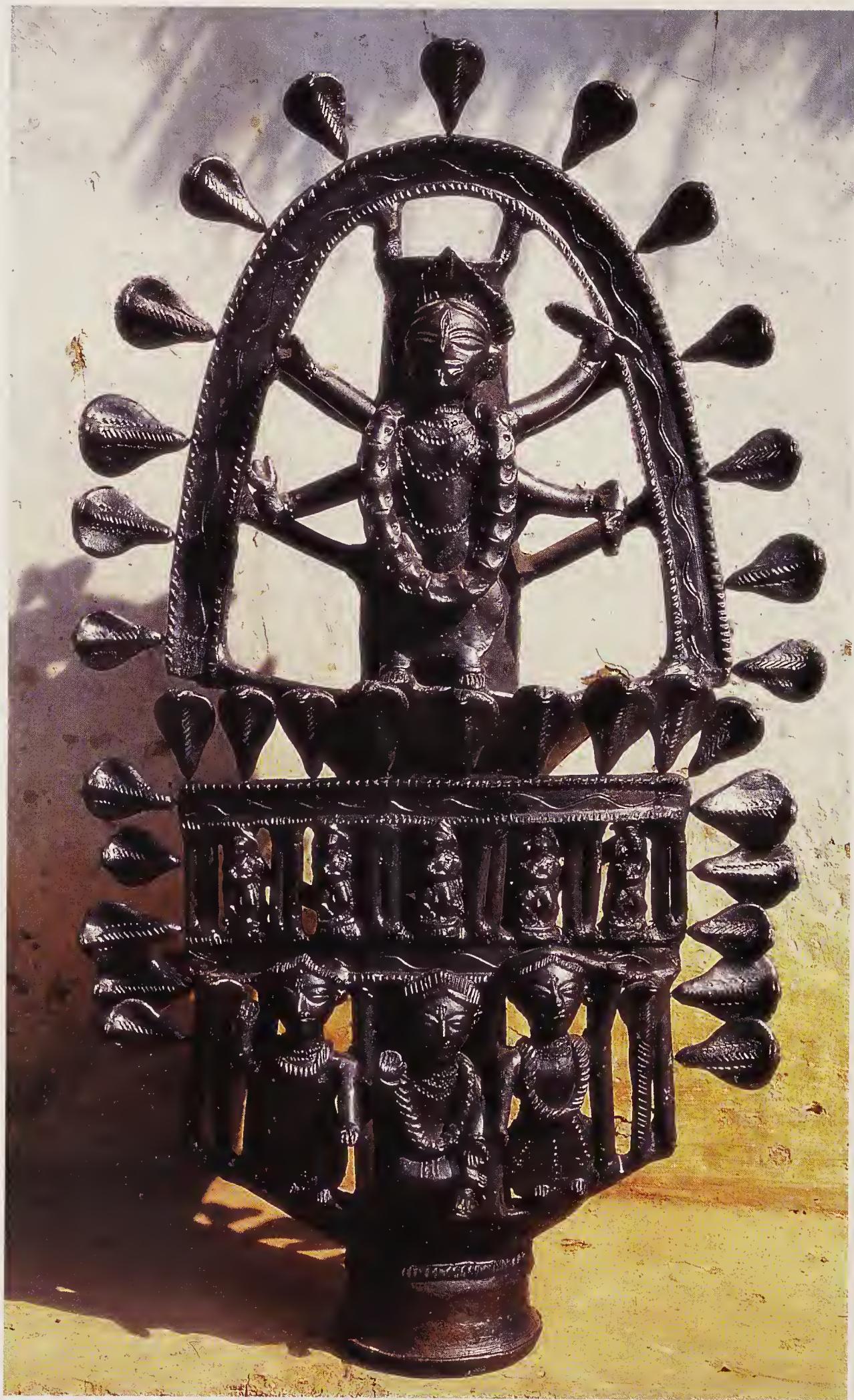
Soon the spirit houses can be seen glowing red through the stoking holes on one side of the pile, and the wood is

quenched with water. The father-in-law pushes the burning embers through to the other side until he is satisfied with the colour, and by 5.05pm it has reached temperature. One of the women brings him water to drink and then sprinkles it around the circumference of the pile to avoid any sparks escaping. This turns out to be a successful firing, but if there is a problem with the clay they can lose the entire contents.

I look up to see five women carrying freshly cut sugar cane on their heads walking past in the evening light, the golden rays setting fire to the moving emerald green leaves. An image to remember forever.



Dhabu (spirit houses) made by Pushpa and her family at the edge of the Tribal shrine which will later be joined by the freshly whitewashed *dhabu* of the dead man. The spirit house is placed over the stone representing the dead person, a clay lamp put inside to give him light, and sweets, rice and money replenished regularly.



West Bengal

The work conducted in West Bengal represents the last geographical area of research for this book. The sequence of events which occur here are to give me direct experience of the important relationship of votive terracotta and wish fulfilment in everyday life.

West Bengal, India's most densely populated state, stretches from the vast Ganges delta at the Bay of Bengal to Darjeeling in the northern Himalayan mountains and is bordered by the state of Bihar to the west, and the country of Bangladesh to the east. Bengal's low lying lands are sustained by rivers and canals, its alluvial plains a rich source for agriculture and clay. It is clay rather than stone (not the indigenous material of the area) which has been the medium through which Bengali culture has found expression for thousands of years. For many generations the terracotta artists of the Bankura area devoted their skills to modelling and sculpting, attaining high levels of acclaim and respect throughout India.

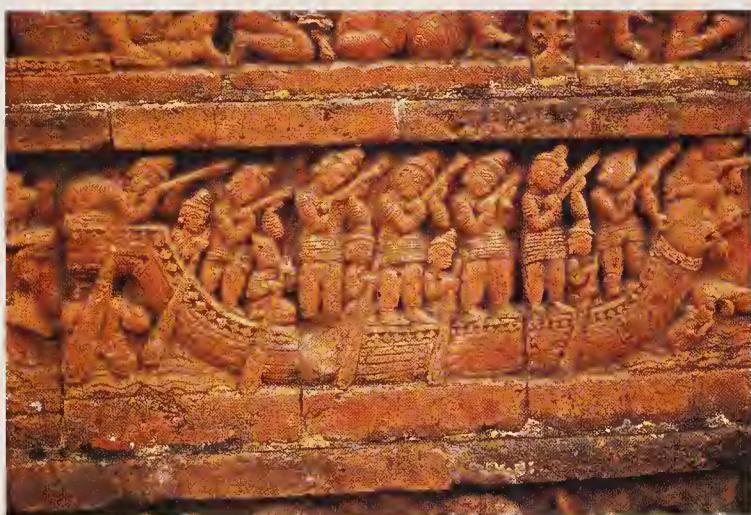
The town of Vishnupur in the Bankura district lies about 200km (124 miles) west of Calcutta, and is famous for its terracotta temples. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, Vishnupur flourished as the capital of the Malla kings who were great patrons of the arts. Due to the lack of stone, the many important buildings and temples in Vishnupur and the surrounding Bankura region were made from brick and covered with ornate terracotta tiles depicting scenes from the Hindu epics of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, as well as everyday life. Through stylised figurative imagery the scenes are illustrated with great vitality and rhythm. The architects both adopted and adapted the local village form of a thatched mud house to create buildings of grand monumentality. By decorating their surfaces with relief terracotta they uniquely combined simplicity of form with an elaborately embellished veneer. For centuries the potters collaborated with the *Sutradhars* – members of the carpenter/carver caste, and together they created an art form (until recently neglected and unrecognised) out of the limitations of working with bas-relief on small brick-size



units. The plaques and tiles were carved by the *Sutradhars* with small thin chisels in semi-hard blocks of plastic clay, especially prepared by the potters and later returned to them for drying and firing. Press moulds were made for the reproduction of repetitive borders and other repeated elements.

It is from this tradition that the potters of Panchmura are descended, to enjoy their reputation and fame. Panchmura is a small town 30km (19 miles) further west of Vishnupur, where a thriving community of 50 families live, producing a range of votive terracotta including horses, tigers, elephants and snakes as well as toys and domestic vessels. During the Aryan invasions of India the ancient Dravidians, who worshipped serpents, took refuge in the outskirts of Bengal, their influence still visible today in the continuing use of the serpent as an object of devotion. *Manasa*, the goddess of snakes, is worshipped in Bengal primarily for her ability to

Opposite: The blackfired *jhar* we will offer to the *Manasa* goddess in return for granting our request for the rain to stop. It is usually placed in the shrine as a gift from the whole community.



Top: The Madana – Mohana Temple, Vishnupur, built in 1694 by the Malla King Durjana Singha. Due to the lack of stone in the Ganges delta of Bengal, important buildings were made from brick and covered with ornate terracotta tiles.

Above: Detail of terracotta tile from the Jor Bungla temple, Vishnupur. The tiles depict scenes from the Hindu epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as well as everyday life. For centuries the potters collaborated with the *Sutradhars* (members of the carpenter/carver caste) to create this art form which, until recently, has been neglected and unrecognised.

remove poisons from the body, especially snakebite. There are countless shrines dedicated to her where clay figures are offered. These shrines are usually near a tree or shrub which may be a *banyan* or fig tree or even a *tulsi* (sacred basil bush, the leaves of which are used by devout Hindus in their daily worship) planted in the courtyard close to the house.

Manasa is primarily worshipped by *Kumbhars* of the Bankura district five times a year in January, June, July, August and October. There are a variety of sculptural forms made using combinations of thrown and modelled pieces, which are offered to the goddess. Large 1.20m (4ft) high trees called *jhar*, containing figurative imagery of *Manasa* and *Shiva* surrounded by snakes, are made to commission and collectively donated by entire communities. I had seen examples of these impressive *jhars* in a private collection of folk art in a Delhi museum a year ago and have come to Panchmura to investigate their origins. They are constructed from a system of architectural cantilevers emerging from thrown pieces which support elaborate tiers of modelled figures and decoration, the entire form bordered by a row of snake heads. Through this work it is easy to see how the skills of contemporary Panchmura potters have been inherited from their ancestors who were instrumental in building the terracotta temples.



Detail of offered horses and elephants at the *Manasa* shrine in Panchmura.

Day 1

We are staying in Vishnupur and travelling daily to Panchmura through a flat agricultural landscape where potatoes, rice, wheat and mustard grow, interspersed with eucalyptus forests planted by the government as part of their reforestation programme. It is raining relentlessly and as we drive through small villages, goats and oxen are huddling against the mud houses in an attempt to shelter themselves. The rice planting has come to a standstill and in Vishnupur the *dhobis* – people who wash clothes – have been forced to take a rest. We arrive at Panchmura and walk around the narrow streets of the potters' community. The mud houses have been built with their verandas facing the unpaved street, usually the working area where pots are thrown and figures are modelled but now packed with lines of horses, elephants, tigers and pots all sadly waiting for the sunshine to appear. Production has slowed down or completely stopped and many potters are clustered in groups, enclosed in tightly wrapped shawls bemoaning the state of the weather. We meet Budhadeb Kumbhar, a tall distinguished man in his early 40s, and are invited to his workshop where we sit on a *charpoy*, surrounded by his family, and discuss the situation of the weather. It has been raining solidly and unseasonably for seven days. The

production of vessels and sculptures, like the rice planting, has stopped and no firings have taken place for the weekly market. Further loss of income will be incurred as the demand for clay items for the approaching *Saraswati puja*, entailing the purchase of pots and incense burners, will also be affected. There is a general air of gloomy resignation in the community. The work of all potters throughout India can be ruined or brought to a standstill by the weather (wind, sun, rain) and rain like this can affect their hand-to-mouth livelihood disastrously.

Budhadeb shows us examples of the various forms offered to *Manasa*. There are four sizes of *jhar*, the largest assembled in four thrown sections, the next with three, then two and the smallest formed from one part. The different sizes relate to how much a person can afford in terms of the extent of gain or favour received from the goddess. The promise of an expensive offering could be fulfilled a few years later when the devotee has sufficient funds to buy it. There are six variations on the basic thrown pot form *ghat* which is made by assembling a pot, an arch, snake heads and a pedestal. The pedestal and pot are thrown on the wheel and the head of the goddess, flanked by snakes, is modelled. *Manasa* is also offered a horse and elephant (always given as a pair), tigers and snakes.



A finished *jhar* by Bhudadev Kumbhar 1m (40in.) high built in 3 sections. The figure on the top is the snake goddess *Manasa*; beneath her are the 6 sons of a nobleman resurrected from poisoning by *Manasa*, the 3 figures at the bottom are devotees of *Manasa*. The cobra heads surrounding the sculpture are detachable, built onto nails which slot into holes.

Prayers to *Manasa*, as well as to prevent against snakebite, are also given during times of drought, and epidemic such as cholera and smallpox. We are hoping to record the making of a *jhar*, but nothing will happen until the rain has stopped. Indru Bhatia, my companion and interpreter, suggests we ask *Manasa* to stop the rain and if our wish is fulfilled then we will donate a large *jhar* to her at a local shrine where the potters worship. During my research in India I have been exposed to many belief systems and now, at the end of my research, it seems natural to try and affect the course of destiny by donating a terracotta gift to the appropriate deity. Having taken the correct course of action, we will be able to accept fate with good humoured resignation. If *Manasa* wishes the sun to shine then it will happen.

Day 2

It is still raining. We drive back to Panchmura along the partially flooded road and are stopped several times by barricades in the form of tree trunks lying across the road. Each time we are surrounded by a group of boys demanding money for their village *Saraswati puja* in return for removing the barricades. *Saraswati* is the goddess of learning, music and the arts and in a few days, on February 1st, Bengalis everywhere will worship her image and perform a *puja* to express their reverence for her. Each neighbourhood will take up a collection to cover the expenses of buying a statue, installing her in a decorated canopied shrine and provide food for the communal *puja*. She will be displayed in a public place for a few days, a statement of the neighbourhood's devotion, and worshipped before immersion in water such as a river, lake or ocean, where she will dissolve. Just as there is friendly competition between neighbourhoods to create the best idol, so it continues in a rush to be the first in the destruction of the idol at the immersion stage of the *puja*. Immersion in water will complete the everpresent cycle of creation and destruction, a precursor and metaphor for the Hindu belief of reincarnation (next year *Saraswati* will be re-created). The statues we see in these villages are fairly modest but in urban areas, during the many and various annual religious festivals, life size sculpted tableaux (or even larger) are worshipped, involving large groups of figures and animals. Businessmen and politicians often patronise important festivals by donating funds towards the cost of popular street icons and in so doing extend their prestige and influence over the community.

Although the sculptors who model these statues are from the *Kumbhar* caste, they rarely produce regular items associated with pottery manufacture, such as vessels and tiles but create their figures from unfired clay, their specialist skills passed down from one generation to another. *Saraswati* is begun with an armature of bamboo wrapped in straw and

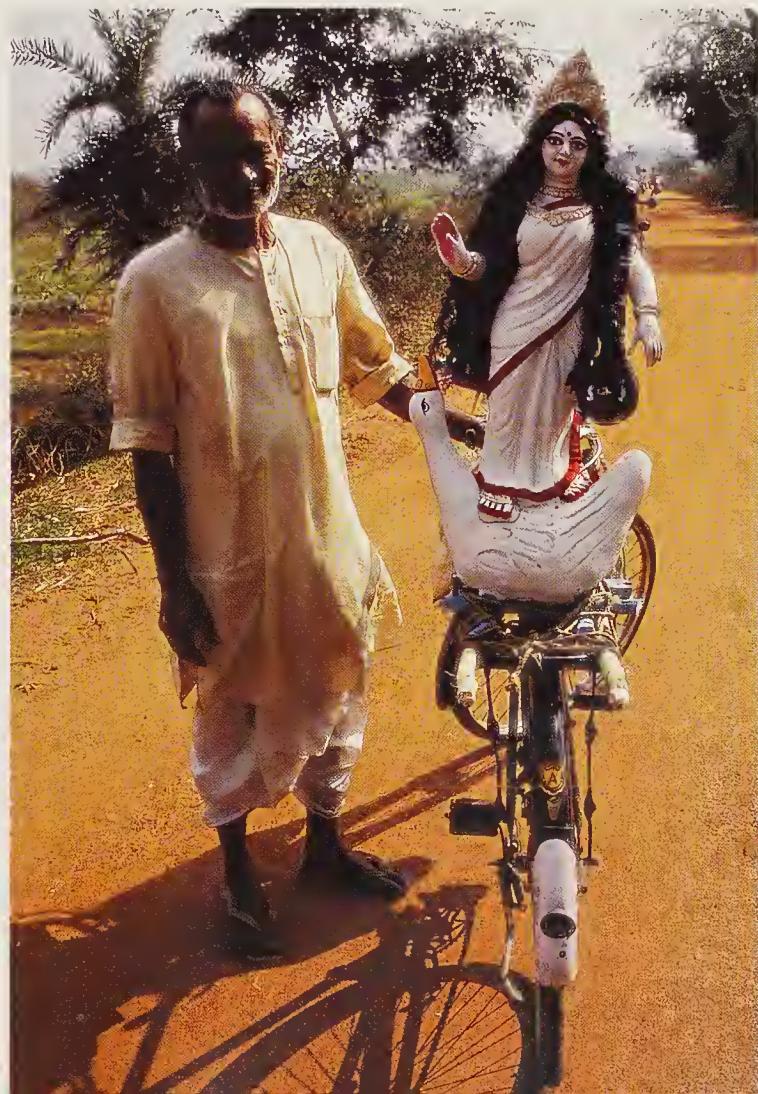


A large *Saraswati* (goddess of learning, music and the arts) statue over a 1m (40in.) high inside a tent made of bunting in Vishnupur. Beside her is a pile of books symbolising learning, her musical instrument is propped in her arm and she rides upon a swan which is her vehicle. It is the morning after the *puja* when she was anointed, bedecked with flowers and given offerings of food. The *alpona* designs can be seen on the ground before her. A *kalasha* has been placed in front of her (a pot bedecked with sacred leaves and flowers). After two days of worship she will be immersed in the river to dissolve.

then covered with a mixture of clay and rice husk to create the rough form of her figure. After drying, a coat of finer clay is added with intricate realistic modelling on the visible areas of face and hands. These exposed parts are further smoothed with slip and painted with lime white before the final rendering of facial and hand details are painstakingly painted with commercial paints. Finally she is dressed in a cloth costume and bedecked with jewels and tinsel. During the next few days we will pass many statues of *Saraswati* ceremoniously travelling along the road from Vishnupur, where she is produced, to outlying villages where she will be installed. Mythologically her vehicle is a swan but practically she moves through the landscape incongruously strapped to the back of a bicycle or cycle rickshaw, the rider carefully guiding her around the precarious pitfalls of deep puddles and slippery mud.

Another popular Indian festival involving the immersion of a terracotta idol is *Ganesha Chaturthi*, celebrated throughout the state of Maharashtra in August/September. At this festival the god *Ganesha*, the plump elephant god – remover of obstacles – is honoured and worshipped for good fortune and happiness. Terracotta images of *Ganesha* are press moulded, thrown and modelled in vast quantities

A man has purchased the unfired clay model of *Saraswati* for his village and is returning home with her strapped to his bicycle. She will be displayed in a public place and worshipped for a few days before immersion in the local river.





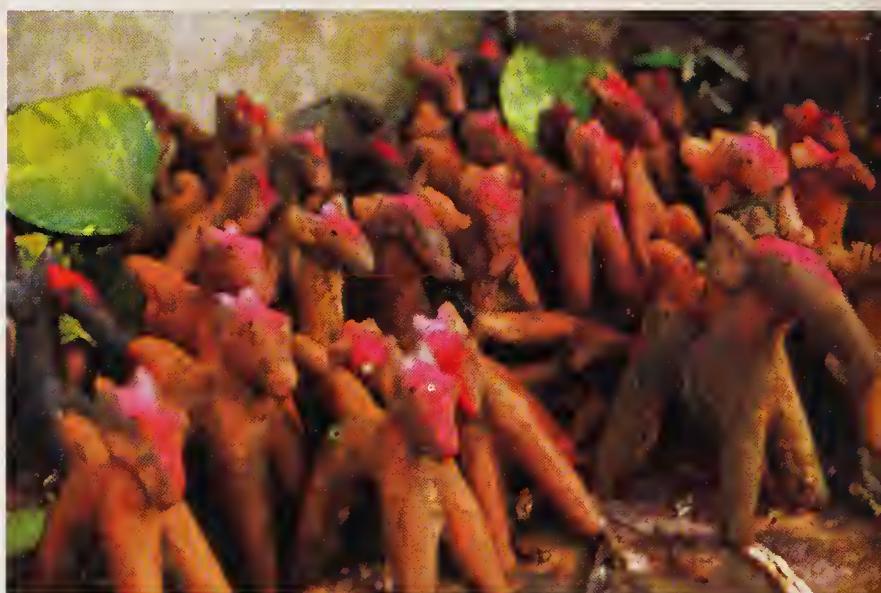
Statue of *Hanuman* 40cm (16in.) high made by Subal Kumbhar of Panchmura from a thrown vessel with modelled attachments. *Hanuman* is the faithful messenger of the gods in the form of a monkey and is worshipped throughout India as a popular folk deity who helps to intervene with fate.

by potters, to be purchased, taken home and installed on a temporary altar. The spirit of *Ganesha* is invoked by a priest to enter the statue and, once he has been given life and breath, the devotees treat him as an honoured guest for ten days by bathing, clothing and feeding him and praying to him for blessings. It is believed that *Ganesha* will remove any obstructions to family harmony within the coming year, on such important occasions as births and marriages. At the end of the ceremony the valuable jewels are removed and he is carried in a procession by the family to the nearest river or temple reservoir where he is immersed in water, to dissolve before once again being fashioned from clay the following year.

Within the pottery community of Panchmura, 30 families are involved with vessel production and the other 20 with what Budhadeb refers to as 'artistic' work (which he considers to be superior). Apart from the constant local demand for votive work there is a steady market through the government Craft Emporia. Several of the potters from this community are invited regularly to major cities and abroad to demonstrate and sell their work. The potters of Panchmura are primarily famous for producing a horse form known throughout India as the *Bankara Horse* which is sold through urban markets as an art object. They range in size from small 30cm (12in.) high horses for local votive use, to monumental 2m (6.45ft) high statues which are made in sections, to be assembled by the buyer. The *Bankura Horse* is immediately recognisable by the stylised diminished length between the front and back legs, giving its proportions a distinctive appearance. The number of young men involved in terracotta modelling and vessel making here is a visible indication of a flourishing trade – in strong contrast to many other areas of India where the diminishing demand for clay products has forced young men into other professions.

Day 3

We wake up to sunshine, the weather forecast predicting an end to the bad weather. It looks as if *Manasa* has answered our prayers. Today on the way to Panchmura we notice several roadside shrines dedicated to *Manasa* and *Shiva*, which had been camouflaged by the mist before. A shrine to the goddess *Kali* (the fierce and bloody consort to *Shiva*) lies



Small pinched elephants and horses offered to *Kundri Buri* (one of the names for *Manasa*) at the village of Dhengasole, Panchmura district. The heads have been anointed with holy vermillion powder and leaves from the sacred *bael* tree placed upon them.



A shrine dedicated to *Kali* (the goddess of destruction, battling demons and adversity) on the road between Vishnupur and Panchmura underneath a sacred *bael* tree. Two large *Bankura* horses stand on either side with smaller offered elephants and horses in between.

beneath a *bael* tree beside the road. She is worshipped here at the festival of *Diwali* and on any no-moon night. A small raised platform built of cement around the tree, holds hundreds of small horses and elephants, each one offered then anointed with a slash of *sindoor* (red vermillion powder) as a sign of blessing. The leaves from the *bael* tree are used during worship and have been placed on the offerings, their bright green colour a startling contrast to the terracotta and vermillion red. As new animals are offered, the previous donations are pushed to the back and behind the tree is a pile of disintegrating terracotta sherds which will slowly become buried in the earth. These horses and elephants are always offered as a pair, hand pinched and modelled in such a way that the horse is always unrealistically larger than the elephant. The potters are unsure how this came about but one interpretation is that while the horse was fighting he suddenly jerked backwards and his neck became elongated.

In Panchmura the rows of horses, elephants, tigers, snakes and pots have been moved into the sunshine and everywhere is busy again with the activity of pottery making. There is hope that the postponed firings will take place later on today

in time for the requirements for the *Saraswati puja*. We need to fulfil our promise to the snake goddess in return for changing the rain into sunshine and Budhadeb arranges for his cousin to build a large *jhar* in two pieces. Bauldas Kumbhar is 32 and lives with his wife and two children within the extended family of his parents. Although he has a Bachelor's degree in commerce, he was unable to find work and joined his father in the family occupation, and now they work together with the help of a second brother, Chandidas. They each specialise in a particular area of the production of sculptural terracotta. Pasupati, his father, concentrates on throwing, Chandidas assembles and joins the animal forms, and Bauldas decorates them. Today Pasupati throws seven pieces resembling various vessel forms which, after stiffening in the sun, will be used to make the basic structure of the *jhar*; four will make up the lower part and three the upper part. He uses a wooden spoked wheel and, after rotating it with a stick, throws on the hump from a standing position, bending low over the wheel. The forms are removed, leaving a hole in the bottom, then placed in the sun to stiffen.



The potters here have formed a co-operative society which purchased an acre of land, the source of their clay, 20 years ago. Communal ownership overcomes the serious problem of many potters throughout India who have recently been faced with charges for clay, where once it was collected free. The family digs the clay once a year, transporting 15 loads by bullock cart in June and storing it in the yard. Clay is mixed with sand (collected from the nearby river and sieved) in a ratio of 4:1 and prepared by wedging with feet and hands. The family's *pukka* workshop has been recently built on the outskirts of the potters' community, although their living quarters remain in the traditional mud houses within the centre. This cement building is an indication of the relatively high standard of income enjoyed by these potters through the constant demand for their work.

Bauldas is sitting cross-legged on the cement floor, systematically forming the various parts of the *jhar* from coils and strips of clay, which he fashions by hand and with the help of various shaped bamboo tools and knives, finishing the surfaces by smoothing them with a wet cloth. He begins to assemble three of the thrown pieces together; these will form the central support of the tree structure. A flared open bowl is slotted onto a bulbous conical form and the third piece, a cylinder, joined to it edge to edge. Next he flattens some clay on the floor into a slab which he cuts into two arched sections in such a way that, when attached to either side of the assembled structure, they flare out like two wings. The wings are supported with sticks to prevent the combination of their weight and slanting angles resulting in collapse. Further work on the *jhar* will continue tomorrow when the parts have stiffened sufficiently, and Bauldas carries on decorating a row of tigers his brother has been assembling from thrown sections.

There is a tradition here for the women to make pinched toys and small votive forms similar to pieces excavated and reconstructed from sherds found at the 300BC site at Chandraketugarh in the Parganas district of West Bengal. Bauldas's mother shows us how she pinches a small figure of the goddess *Shasti*, a bird-faced mother holding two children also with bird faces. As guardian deity of childbirth and childhood, *Shasti* is one of the most popular goddesses in Bengal, worshipped within a month of the birth of a newborn, and then up to three times a year according to the

Right: Bauldas forming the various parts of the *jhar* from coils and strips of clay which he fashions by hand with the help of various shaped bamboo tools and knives.

Opposite: Bauldas's mother pinching a *Shasti* figure (the goddess of childbirth and childhood). These votive figures and toys which Bengali women potters make are similar to those excavated from sites dating back to 300BC at Chandraketugarh in the Parganas district of West Bengal.

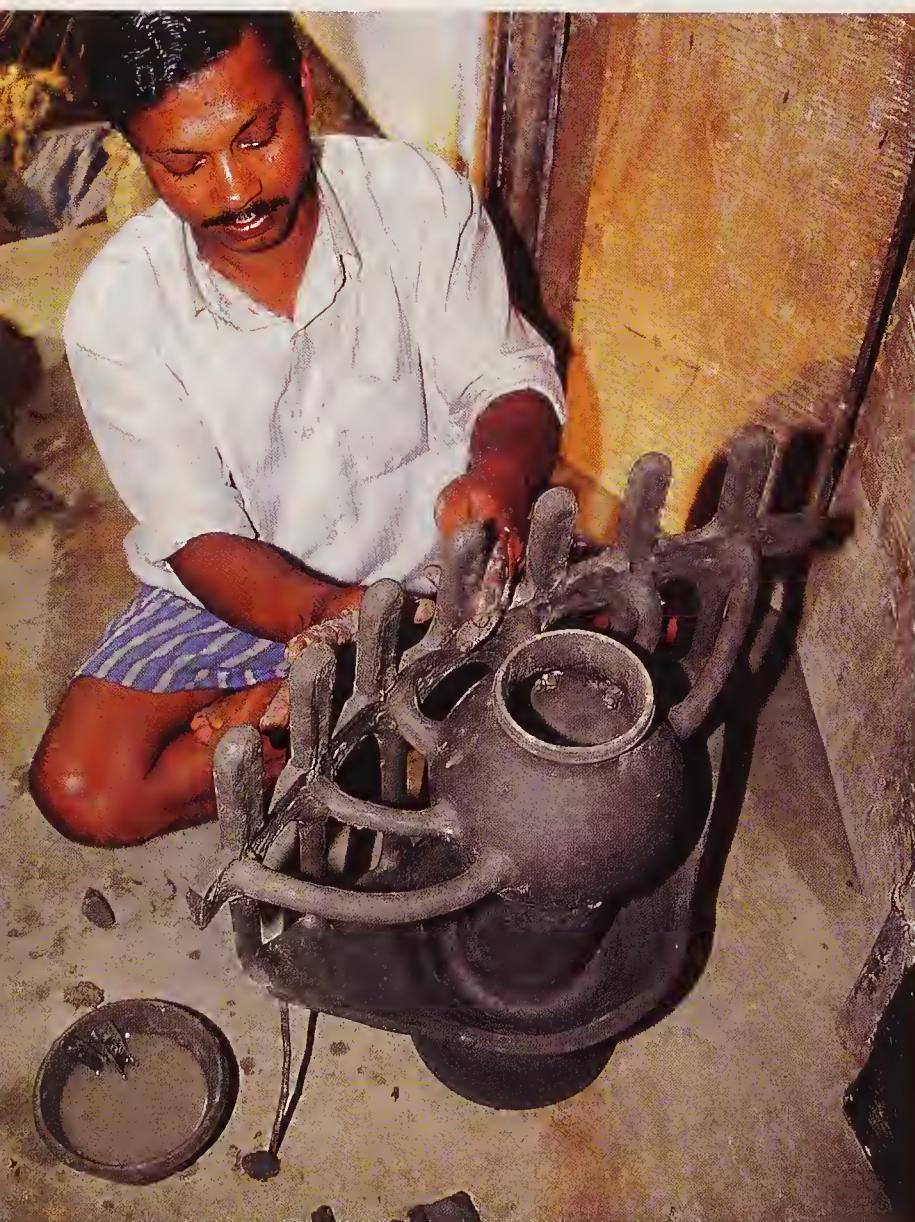


From right to left: Bauldas and his father, Pasupati Kumbhar from Panchmura, Bengal.



practice of the family. Another toy called *rail* comprises a row of four bird-faced children standing on a platform playing a game of 'trains', linked by each one's arms resting on the shoulders of the one in front. Bauldas's mother works quickly, her fingers moulding the soft clay into simple stylised forms, finishing off with incised decoration. There is a popular Bengali nursery rhyme which she would have very likely recited to Bauldas when he was a young child, with its particular reference to clay:

*My son, who says your nose is too small?
I've brought clay from the lake of joy
And will set it right.*

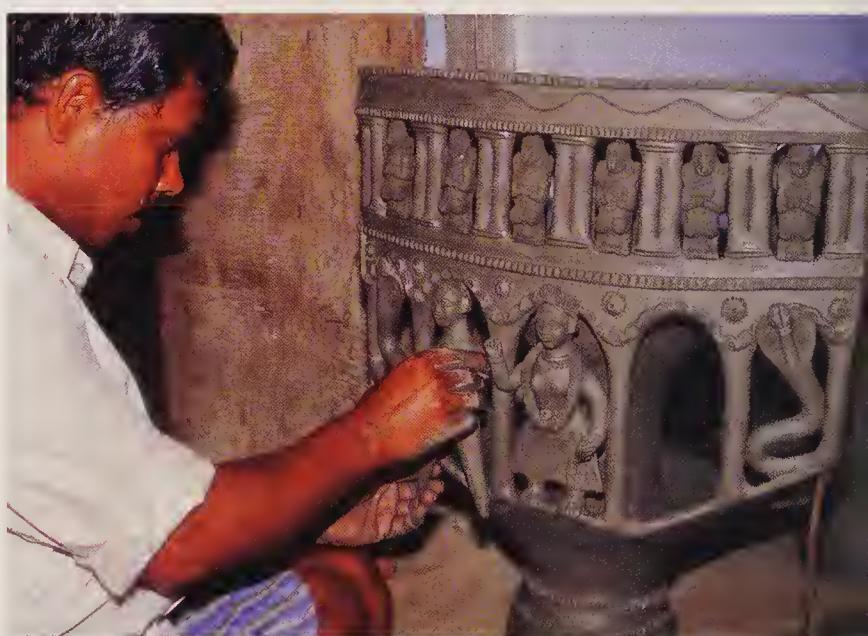


Bauldas assembling the *jhar*. The six coiled and right-angled cantilevers have been attached along one side of the structure from the belly of the top pot form to the edge of the wings (still supported with sticks). The gaps between the pillars he is forming will contain figures.

Day 4

Our pact with *Manasa* is holding and the sunshine is continuing. After we left yesterday, Bauldas joined the fourth thrown section, resembling a small full-bellied pot, to the core structure, and it is now dry enough to proceed with the next stage. Six 2.5cm (1in.) thick coiled and right-angled cantilevers are attached along one side of the structure, from the belly of the top pot form to the edge of the wings (still supported at this stage with sticks). Now a flat decorated strip of clay is attached along the top corner of the cantilevers where they change from vertical to horizontal. He has cut a ledge into the corners so that the flat strip of clay can 'sit' on the ledge. In order for the structure to remain stable, each piece Bauldas joins and assembles has to be at just the right stage of dryness/moistness. His inherited knowledge equips him with these construction skills, placing the creation of the *jhar* firmly in the tradition of the terracotta temple architecture of his forefathers.

Now there is a definite front and back to the *jhar*. Bauldas begins to fill in the corners between the vertical cantilevers with soft clay to form arches, so that the cantilevers become pillars. The borders of the arches are emphasised with balls of clay which he models into conical studs. He starts to attach the next tier of pillars which are made from a coil doubled over to form a double coil and, once in position, embellishes them with thin coils wrapped around their bases and tops. Ledges are cut into the top of these pillars to support another decorated flat strip of clay. Six press-moulded figures



The press moulded figures who were saved from poisoning by *Manasa* have been fixed in between the top tier of pillars. Now Bauldas places the modelled figures of the three devotees of *Manasa* flanked by snakes into the bottom tier of arches.



An inverted pot with modelled facial features called *Bonga Devata* bought by the *Santal* Tribe and placed under sacred trees dedicated to *Bonga*, a universal power, responsible for all the forces of nature.

representing the six sons of a nobleman who were resurrected from poisoning by *Manasa* are fixed in between this second tier of arches. Moulds were originally made from bisque fired clay but were recently changed to plaster and are also used for press moulding the heads of figures and snakes.

Bauldas makes two snakes from coils, modelling their heads by flattening the ends with his thumbs, and fixes them into the two outside arches on the bottom level, before decorating them with impressed patterns. Now he starts to model the three figures of the devotees of *Manasa* who will fill the remaining three arches on the bottom tier. A commission such as this is carried out alongside everyday production work and Bauldas needs to continue his everyday commitment to the family. The *jhar* is left to stiffen further until tomorrow.

We are shown examples of votive work bought specifically by the local community of the *Santal* tribe who inhabit the forests of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. The *Santals* believe in a universal power called *Bonga* which is responsible for all the forces of nature; *Bonga* is not considered a personal deity in the way that most Hindu gods are thought to be individual. The *Santals* have become Hinduized through the gradual influence of their Hindu neighbours, and commission small pinched figures of horses which are placed underneath sacred trees dedicated to *Bonga*. They also buy images called *Bonga Devata*, inverted

thrown pots with modelled facial features of eyes, ears and mouths with large teeth and drooping tongues, which are offered for the welfare of children.

Day 5

Today is 1st February, *Saraswati puja* day, and on the road from Vishnupur to Panchmura we pass through several villages where the goddess has already been installed in all her glory within an enclosed canopy of brightly coloured bunting. Taped Hindi pop music is blaring out around her through loudspeakers and there is an air of festivity and celebration. As we arrive at the workshop, Bauldas's wife Lohita is decorating, with a thin white clay slip, the thresholds and mud floor of the courtyard with auspicious patterns, to invoke the goddess and secure her blessing. This tradition is called *Alpona* and is practised all over India (especially in Tamil Nadu), and entails pouring either rice powder, stone powder or liquid slip through the fingers with an even flow to create linear designs on floors and courtyards. The skills are passed from mother to daughter and although Lohita is creating fairly simple designs today, I have seen exquisitely elaborate *Alpona* decorations covering whole courtyards.

Bauldas has finished modelling the three figures and inserts them into their final resting place, inside the arches. Now he starts on the upper detachable section of the *jhar* which will be the home of *Manasa* herself. The three remaining thrown vessel forms, mirror images (except smaller) to the ones already supporting the lower half of the *jhar* are assembled in the same way but without the fourth waterpot shape. Wings are formed and attached to the edge of the flaring vessel and a similar cantilever system constructed to support three tiers of arches. The first arch is a flat one, embedded and surrounded with a line of leaves, the second a coil embellished with press-moulded flower motifs, and the third another flat decorated strip. Inside the centre of these arches Bauldas lovingly places the modelled figure of *Manasa*. Throughout the creation of the *jhar* he has worked with the same focused concentration and devotion I have observed in all the potters making votive terracotta. The perimeter of the *jhar* has been pierced with holes which will receive the detachable snake heads supported on metal nails. Bauldas assembles the two parts by slotting the central support of the top section onto that of the lower. After several days of drying the *jhar* will be ready for the firing.

Firing takes place inside an enclosed cylindrical kiln constructed from a mixture of mud and straw and sheltered by a thatched roof supported by pillars. A stoking channel leads to a hollow area beneath the floor of the kiln, the heat rising up through a grid whose structure is formed by bamboo covered with mud. Once the fuel was wood but it



A pujari (priest) from the Santal Tribe living on the outskirts of Panchmura, conducting a ritual to predict illness at the shrine in his courtyard dedicated to the god *Savitri Seela*. Offered elephants, a *jhar* and images of *Bonga*, line the surrounds of the shrine. The ritual entails folding three sacred leaves, securing each one with a thorn and placing them on the stone. After invoking the deity he opens the leaves and bases his prediction on their changed form.

is now so scarce that it has been replaced with dried leaves which are collected in the forests and sold to the potters by the sack load. After loading, the work is covered with straw and mud; stoking begins gradually, building up to temperature over a period of three to four hours. About half of the votive work made in Panchmura is blackfired and this is achieved by pushing cowdung cakes into the stoking chamber, then sealing the firebox mouth and any holes on the surface with mud to trap the blackening smoke into the clay.

Bhudhadev has been a frequent visitor to his cousin's workshop, keen to observe the progress of the *jhar* and chat to us. While demonstrating at the Delhi Crafts Museum he has seen terracotta with a mixture of both red (oxidised) and black (carbonised) surfaces and describes a red surface with a pattern of black dots which he would like to incorporate into his work. He has the knowledge to fire either red or black but not to control a combination (their red oxidised work often has black fire marks but these are unpredictable) and asks me if I know how. With 15 years experience of smoke firing my own work, it is a great honour to demonstrate a new technique to an Indian *Kumbhar*, for I have been a constant sponge to their skills and knowledge throughout the period of my research. The firing requires some fast burning combustible and I ask if they have dry newspaper which is quickly produced. I show him how to achieve a resist against the blackening flame using clay slurry. Several other curious potters have come to watch and one of them disapprovingly remarks, 'It's very inauspicious to burn newspaper on *Saraswatipuja* day.' (Newspaper symbolises learning and she is the goddess of learning.) Bhudhadev replies, 'But we're burning newspaper in order to learn so it's the reverse – it's very auspicious and will please the goddess.'

Day 6

Today we will fulfil our promise to *Manasa* for giving us sunshine and install the *jhar* in her shrine. Bauldas and Bhudhadev with their respective wives and children, and another potter and his family, are all waiting, having bathed and dressed in their best clothes. They have chosen a *Harijan* shrine about 3km (1.5 miles) away, situated on the edge of the village Deulbhira. It is unusual for members of the *Kumbhar* caste to worship in a shrine belonging to another community but some years ago a potter had gone to the *Harijan* shrine to worship, and because his wish was granted a strong faith has developed.

In order to donate an offering the *pujari* (priest) responsible for the shrine has to be notified so that preparations can be made for the *puja*. We have bought the ingredients required – fresh flowers (*shandmala*), paper flowers (*sakha*), a pair of conch shell bangles wrapped in a *sal* leaf, scented tree gum resin (*dhoona*), charcoal containers (*dhoop*),



Bauldas working on the upper detachable section of the *jhar* which is the home of *Manasa*, represented by the central figure.

incense, red vermillion powder (*sindoor*), a square piece of red cotton cloth (*salu*), mustard oil (*sarso-ka-tail*), *bael* leaves, two lamps (*pradeep*), plus ingredients for the sweet food (*prasad*), including fruit, flattened rice (*chura*), unrefined sugar (*jaggery*), a sweet made from chickpea flour plus raw unboiled milk (*bhoondia*). The potters have also donated two pairs of elephants and horses.

The blackfired *jhar* is carefully lain in the boot of the taxi and we make two journeys in order to transport the three families to the shrine which is situated under a *bael* tree adjoining open ground. A very simple stone-carved figure representing the goddess lies on the ground, surrounded by a horseshoe shaped bank of hundreds of terracotta offerings. The mother of the *pujari* is cleaning the floor, brushing away dust and leaves in preparation for an *alpona* design drawn onto the ground in front of the goddess. We are waiting for the *pujari* who is bathing, ritually cleansing himself in order to awaken and serve the goddess. Bhudhadev lights



Left: The Harijan shrine on the edge of the village of Deulbhira where our *jhar* will be offered. The mother of the *pujari* (priest) has swept the ground and drawn an *alpona* design with rice powder to invoke the goddess. A simple stone carved figure of the goddess is set into the ground surrounded by a horseshoe shaped bank of hundreds of terracotta offerings.

Below: The *prasad* (food offering) has been prepared and is offered to the goddess. The *pujari* (priest) has clicked his fingers to awaken her and alert her to accept the offering and now he bows down in prayer before her.





Above: The pujari (priest) placing paper flowers on the *jhar* and the terracotta statues. The goddess and *jhar* have been bathed, cleansed, anointed, dressed and adorned. The clay lamps are burning on the ground on either side of her to alert her attention.

Right: The *jhar* has been offered to *Manasa* the goddess of snakes worshipped throughout Bengal. We have fulfilled our promise to her.



the incense and charcoal inside the *dhoop burners* and the *pujari* appears in a clean white *lungi*. He bows in front of the goddess and then spreads all the ingredients out on the floor ready for the succession of rituals which will bathe, anoint, clothe, embellish and feed her.

He begins the *puja* by flicking water over the goddess, the *jhar* and the terracotta offerings around her, to purify them. He lifts the *jhar* and moves it next to the goddess then mixes the *sindoor* with mustard oil and anoints the forehead of first the goddess, then the *jhar*, followed by the statues immediately flanking her. The *bael* leaves are washed and placed in the same order over the goddess and her statues. Bhudadev is sprinkling the gum resin onto the burning charcoal, and its sweet smell wafts over the shrine. The incense sticks are lit and placed on either side of the goddess, followed by the lighted oil lamps to awaken her senses of smell and sight. Now the *pujari* washes the yellow marigold heads and places them on her head and on the *Manasa* figure in the *jhar*. At this point the flower falls off the head of the goddess and is replaced; Bhudhadev tells us that this is an auspicious sign from the goddess to us. A leaf from the sacred *tulsi* bush (sweet basil) is balanced over the flower and then a gold *bindi* (decorative forehead mark for women) stuck to her forehead. A sacred thread is tied around her, the conch bangles placed at her arms, the red cloth at her waist and lastly the paper flowers placed to adorn her. The goddess has

been bathed, cleansed, dressed and adorned and now the *pujari* kneels before her and prays.

Next the *prasad* (food offering) is prepared. The *pujari* cuts up banana, apple, orange, potato, peas and cucumber, and Bhudadev pours the flat rice into three large brass bowls, mixing it with water and *jaggery* (unrefined sugar) and the sweet chickpea mixture. The *prasad* is mixed together and the three bowls placed in front of the goddess. The *pujari* clicks his fingers to awaken her and alert her to accept the offering. Bhudadev divides the *prasad* onto plates made from dried leaves and the *pujari* offers it for all the devotees to eat. *Manasa* has been brought to life and given *pranapratistha* (breathing life into an idol) in order to receive our offering, and now she can rest until she is invoked again.

We return to the workshop and start to say goodbye. This is the end of a research spanning three years and I am suddenly overcome with tearful emotion; sad to be leaving and finishing the many months of working with village potters, of experiencing their overwhelming hospitality and generosity of spirit, often in the face of great adversity. I burst into tears and find it impossible to stop. Then I notice Indru, my interpreter and companion is also crying. The potters look alarmed and then as my tears die down, I notice Bauldas's tears are beginning to roll down his cheeks. A copy of this book will be sent to them – a reminder of our time spent together.

Take a golden comb
bathe in shining water
look at your body in the glass
the body is made of earth
it will be mingled with earth again
were it made of bell metal
you could change it for another
were it made of copper
you could change it for another
but no man can change
his earthen body.

A song of the *Gond* tribe, Madhya Pradesh

Glossary

Aawanmata the mother goddess depicted holding a sword worshipped by Tribals from western India

Ahindrodev mountain god worshipped by Tribals in Gujarat

Ahir the farming community living in Kutch

Alpona auspicious and sacred designs executed by women on walls, floors and courtyards

Ance a creeping plant indigenous to Uttar Pradesh

Aryans those who migrated from Persia and settled in northen India

Ayanaar the god worshipped in Tamil Nadu for protection

Bael a tree whose leaves are used for sacred ceremonies in West Bengal

Baiga a tribe from the Sarguja area of Madhya Pradesh

Banyan Indian fig tree

Bargaya a tribe from the Sarguja area of Madhya Pradesh

Baval a tree indigenous to Gujarat

Bendri female monkey offered as a terracotta to the personal deity within the home in Madhya Pradesh

Bhagat priest

Bhairam Devi goddess worshipped at harvest time in Madhya Pradesh

Bhaker mountain god worshipped by Tribals in Gujarat

Bharamdev hill god worshipped by Tribals in Gujarat

Bhatara a Tribe living in Madhya Pradesh

Bhil a Tribe inhabiting areas of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat

Bhima Dev a god worshipped in Madhya Pradesh if the monsoon is late

Bhopa the priest of a Tribal community

Bhunga mud house from Kutch

Bidi hand rolled cigarette made from a leaf

Bidri inlaid metalwork from Muslim origins

Bindi forehead mark

Bonga the universal power responsible for all the forces of nature worshipped by the *Santal* Tribe of West Bengal

Bonga Devata An inverted pot with modelled facial features offered to *Bonga*

Boori Mata a goddess worshipped in Madhya Pradesh

Brahma primary Hindu male god worshipped as the Creator

Brahmin a member of the priest caste, the highest Hindu caste

Caste an Indian's hereditary station in life

Celaiamman mother goddess worshipped in Tamil Nadu for those who want children

Chakpuja a ritual performed in rural north India where the bride and female members of her family worship at the potter's wheel for fertility and success

Chamunda the mother goddess depicted riding an elephant and worshipped by Tribals in Rajasthan/Gujarat/Madhya Pradesh areas

Chapatti unleavened Indian bread

Char a fruit bearing tree from Madhya Pradesh

Charpoy Indian rope bed

Chaudhri Tribal community from southern Gujarat

Cheel pine tree

Chillum pipe of the hookah

Chitta wall decoration applied with the figures using rice powder and water in Orissa

Chodhris a Tribal community from Gujarat

Chulla mud stove

Dahl lentil soup

Dalits preferred term for communities with no caste (untouchables)

Dev a god worshipped for village protection by the Tribal communities of Gujarat

Dev Narayan a popular Tribal god represented riding a horse with sword in hand and worshipped in the Rajasthan region

Devdovi a Tribal musical instrument

Devlimali a form of the mother goddess worshipped by Tribals in Gujarat

Dhabasma a form of the mother goddess worshipped by Tribals in Gujarat

Dhabu dome shaped terracotta house offered to the spirit of the dead

Dhant Sara Devi a goddess in Madhya Pradesh who is offered the tiger to prevent illness and avoid misfortune

Dhobi person who washes clothes

Dhoop incense container

Dhoti loin cloth worn by Indian men – often tucked between the legs

Dhurwa a Tribal community from Madhya Pradesh

Diyas clay oil lamp

Diwali festival of lights - Hindu New Year

Dorla a Tribal community from Madhya Pradesh

Dowry money and goods given by a bride's parents to their son in law's family

Dravidians the aboriginal races of India, pushed south by the Aryans

Dublas members of a Tribal community from Gujarat

Durga the mother goddess, consort to *Shiva* in the form of a fierce woman riding a tiger, the destroyer of evil

Gam Gondhro a god worshipped for cattle protection by Tribal communities in the Gujarat area

Gami a Tribal community from Gujarat

Ganesh the plump elephant-headed god who is worshipped as the Remover of Obstacles

Ganesha Chaturthi a festival celebrated in Maharashtra in August/September when *Ganesh* is worshipped for good fortune

Gariyat a Tribal community from the Rajasthan area

Ghasia a Tribal community from Madhya Pradesh

Gheru red iron clay slip

Gobarmitti clay made from a mixture of clay and cow dung

Gond a Tribal community from Madhya Pradesh

Gora Bhairav a mild compassionate god worshipped by the Tribal communities of Gujarat

Govaldev the cowherd god worshipped by Tribal communities of Gujarat

Guava a fruit bearing tree

Gujari a Tribal community from the Rajasthan area

Handi cooking vessel

Hanuman a popular Hindu god in the form of a monkey who helps to intervene with fate

Harijans term introduced by Mahatma Gandhi meaning 'children of god' referring to people with no caste previously labelled 'untouchable'

Himaryo a terracotta horse offered to the field god *Himaryo Dev* in Gujarat

Hing La Gin Mata Devi a god worshipped for general blessings in Madhya Pradesh

Holi the colour festival to mark the end of winter and the beginning of summer held in February/March

Howdah elephant saddle

Ind Pagran a god worshipped for shepherd protection by Tribal communities of Gujarat

Jaggery raw sugar

Jajmani an inherited reciprocal arrangement between two families or individuals in which the goods and services of one are exchanged for another

Jaljeera a refreshing drink made from water and cumin seeds

Jat Muslim shepherds and farmers from Kutch

Jhar a modelled 'tree' containing figurative imagery of *Manasa* the snake goddess and *Shiva* surrounded by snakes which is offered at shrines in West Bengal

Kabis a slip similar to terra sigillata used in Uttar Pradesh. It is made from a mixture of wheatfield clay, mango tree bark, bamboo leaves plus leaves from a creeper mixed with soda

Kachcha impure and uncooked clay in its unfired state is considered kachcha meaning porous, impermanent

Kakabaila the smallpox god worshipped by Tribal communities from Gujarat

Kala Bhairav a cunning and strong willed god worshipped by Tribal communities from the Rajasthan area

Kalakadad a mountain god worshipped by Tribal communities from Gujarat

Kalasha a pot covered with sacred leaves and a coconut which is a symbol of welcome and placed outside temples and homes

Kali Bhut a god worshipped for crop protection by Tribal communities in Gujarat

Kamdenu a cow with a human face whci is offered at *Shiva* temples in Madhya Pradesh during *Shivrarti*

Karappan a demon god worshipped in Tamil Nadu

Karma the principal of retributive justice for past deeds

Karsa Kondhi a large oil lamp with five wicks made by potters from Madhya Pradesh and used during *Diwali*

Karva a clay pot which is filed with sweetmeats and female symbols of adornment to be used in the *Karva Chauth* festival

Karva Chauth a festival practised in Northan India where all married woman fast for a day for the longevity of their husbands

Kattalai a plant from Tamil Nadu whose leaves are used to make paintbrushes

Kedbaima a form of the mother goddess worshipped by Tribal communities in Gujarat

Kedu Bhai a god worshipped for general protection by Tribal communities in Gujarat

Khakara a tree whose leaves are used by potters from Gujarat

Khaprelu Chiria a bird modelled in clay and attached to a roof tile in Madhya Pradesh to protect the house from the evil eye

Khatri carved wooden memorial figure installed to commemmorate those who meet with accidental death such as drowning or murder

Khokhadi a long pole with jingles attached used by Tribal communities of Gujarat for worship

Kosumbdo a tree whose resin is used as lacquer for sealing pots by Tribal communities from Gujarat

Kotha a grain container

Kothi large vessels for water storage

Kraal a tree whose leaves are used by potters from Himachal Pradesh

Krishna a most popular Hindu god, an incarnation of the god *Vishnu* and often coloured blue

Kshatriya one of the four castes – soldiers and governors

Kulhar disposable cups thrown on the wheel for serving tea at stations, street corners or at social gatherings such as weddings

Kumbhar a member of the caste community whose hereditary occupation is the making of fired vessels and terracotta

Kurala Panchmi a festival during November/December when potters worship the spirits of their wheels and tools

Lipna a wall decoration carried out in Madhya Pradesh for the festival of *Shaukranti*

Lunghi a piece of cloth wrapped around the waist

Mahabharata an ancient epic containing many of the most important Hindu legends

Mahout an elephant rider/master

Manasa a snake goddess worshipped for her power to cure snakebite and sickness

Manji a low wooden table from a *bhunga* house to support piles of embroidered quilts

Maria a Tribal community from Madhya Pradesh

Marwar Meghwal a community living in Kutch, oiginally from Rajasthan whose occupation is that of leather worker

Mata Devi a mother goddess worshipped in Madhya Pradesh at harvest time

Mati clay

Matka water pot

Mauli Devi a goddess worshipped to prevent illness and avoid misfortune in Madhya Pradesh

Medival a plant grown for its laxitive properties

Mela fair

Moha a tree from which liquor is made

Moksha spiritual salvation which frees us from the cycle of rebirth

Munivar ferocious gods requiring blood sacrifice worshipped in Tamil Nadu

Muria a Tribal community in Madhya Pradesh

Nagadev a serpent god worshipped in India since ancient times

Naikas a Tribal community from Gujarat

Nava Khani a festival celebrated in September when the first grains of rice begin to ripen in Madhya Pradesh

Neem a species of tree

Pakka 'pure'; refers to articles of permanent substance such as stone or metal which can be cleaned

Paniyan a low decorated mud table to support stacks of pots in a *bhunga* house

Paraja a Tribal community from Orissa

Parja a Tribal community from Madhya Pradesh

Parvati the consort of *Shiva*

Pedlo a raised platform made of mud to suppot storage containers, built into a *bhunga* house

Pendra Oodin Devi a god worshipped for general blessings in Madhya Pradesh

Pithoro a painting representing the marriage of *Pithoro* commissioned by Tribal communities of Gujarat area where the family is afflicted by great misfortune

Pola the rice festival in September in Madhya Pradesh

Prajapati 'Lord of the Peoplee'; also the family name of some potters in north India

Pranapratistha the act of breathing life into an idol

Prasad a blessed food offering

Puja worship

Pujari priest

Purdah the custom of women to cover their head with a veil in the presence of men

Purna and Puskala the consorts of *Ayanaar*; representing desire and action

Rabari tribal nomadic sheep and camel herders

Rajwar a Tribal community living in Madhya Pradesh

Rali Shankar a festival celebrated in Kanga, Himachal Pradesh to commemorate the death of *Rali* who discovered on her wedding day that her husband was much shorter than her and committed suicide out of shame

Ram a legendary religious hero from the epic *Ramayana*

Ramayana one of India's most popular legends – the story of *Rama* and *Sita* and their conflict with the demon *Ravana*

Rangoli sacred patterns formed on the threshold and mud floor with rice powder

Rao Dev a god worshipped as protector of village boundaries in Madhya Pradesh

Rathwas a tribal community from Gujarat

Roti unleavened bread cooked on the fire

Rotlo an unleavened bread made in the Kutch area

Sancha a potter's wheel used in Madhya Pradesh

Santal a Tribal community from West Bengal

Sarai an indigenous tree from the jungles of Madhya Pradesh

Saraswati goddess of learning, music and the arts

Saraswati Puja worship of *Saraswati* in West Bengal

Sari a six metre length of cloth wrapped around the body worn by many Indian women

Shankranti a festival where it is traditional to give charity to the poor and needy

Sgraffito decoration in which slip is scratched or cut away to reveal the clay body beneath

Shasti the goddess of childbirth and childhood

Shiva one of the primary gods known as the 'Destroyer'

Sigri mud stove

Sindoor vermillion, the sacred colour of worship

Sirha a person who becomes obsessed

Surahi narrow necked water pot

Sudras one of the four main castes representing manual workers, artisans and potters

Sutradhar members of the carver/carpenter caste

Tadi a palm tree from which liquor is made

Tanginath Devta a god worshipped before rice planting by the *Baiga* Tribe from Madhya Pradesh

Tavala clay dishes made by women of the *Rathwa* Tribe and sealed with lacquer

Tavdi open dishes used to make *rotlo*

Terra Sigillata a reddish brown slightly glossy surface obtained by a very fine clay slip

Thakurdev a village god worshipped in Madhya Pradesh

Tubraj a mountain god worshipped by Tribal communities Gujarat

Tulasi a goddess who is the consort of *Vishnu* and worshipped in the form of the sacred Tulasi plant (sweet basil)

Vaisyas one of the four main castes representing tradespeople and farmers

Vasavas a Tribal community from Gujarat

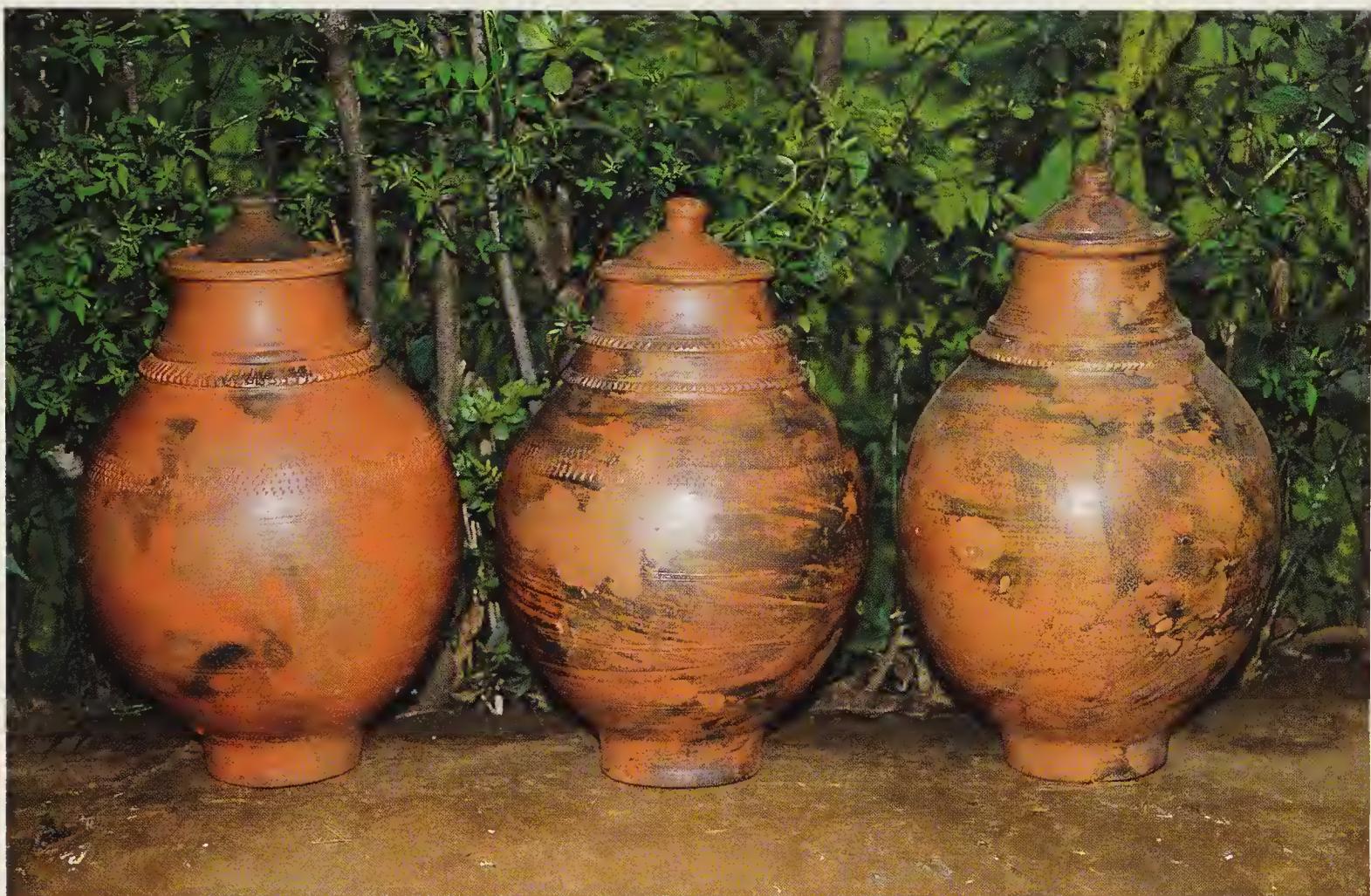
Vedas sacred texts of divine knowledge containing the main principles of Hindu philosophy

Vermilion the *sindoor* powder used in worship

Vishu one of the primary three gods known as the 'Preserver'

Viskvakarna 'Creator of the World' a term sometimes applied to potters in India

Vrata a personal vow between devotee and god



Pickle jars thrown and turned by Jaswant Singh, Kangra district, Himachal Pradesh. They are covered with a terra sigillata slip and fired in a horseshoe kiln with a mixture of cow dung and wood.

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Susan Peterson is an internationally well known presence in the ceramics field. She taught for many years and is the author of such landmark books in the field including *The Living Tradition of Maria Martinez*, *Shoji Hamada, A Potter's Way and Work*, *The Craft and Art of Clay* and *Working with Clay*. A practising potter, Susan Peterson is a frequent exhibitor and often lectures around the world. She has won many awards for her contribution to the ceramics world.



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